JOHNSONS PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

KITAB MAHAL

(AVI)

Kitab Mahal Series of English Literature

JOHNSON

PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

EDITED WITH

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION, SYNOPSIS, AND NOTES

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PREFACE

Modern English Criticism has its roots or points of departure in Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare*. It is a document that sums up a body as principles gathered from experience, tested by reflection and experience, and enunciated in a practical way by Dr. Johnson. It preserves the best of the classical, neoclassical, and Longinian traditions and it also has an atmosphere of the Englishman's cultural Chauvnism. At places the text reads like a brilliant passage from the great Romantic critics. Throughout there is the stamp of the great charm of English Literature.

The text of the *Preface* is packed with scholarship and enlightened commonsense, as it was written by a distinguished scholar of the 18th century. He was not a mere scholar but a firm believer in the fine art of living. The critical document of such an author needs a critical introduction and explanation of difficult passages. As Johnson himself said in the *Preface*, "notes are a necessary evil."

The present edition is devised to make the students take a greater and better interest in the works of Dr. Johnson. Boswell has usurped the attention of the readers ; but Johnson. needs no introduction from a Boswell.

THE EDITOR

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TO

JOHNSON : PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Life and Work of Dr. Johnson

Samual Johnson was born at Lichfield on September 18, 1709. The son of a book-seller, he was precocious. Early in life he fell a victim to scrofula. He had a good mastery of Latin which surprised all his teachers. He spent three years at Oxford and was forced to return without a degree because of a collapse of his father's business. The friend who assured support withdrew and Johnson had to retire to Lichfield. Soon after his father died leaving him a little inheritance. He was therefore forced to depend on his own wits in his great struggle with poverty. He tried conducting a school and did some hackwork. It was all a failure. In these trying circumstances he met a widow Mrs. Poster who was older to him. They were married and now life became more tiresome and troublesome.

Johnson left for London and began doing miscellaneous work for the publishers. In may 1738 appeared his poem *London.* This brought him recognition and it was followed by his *Life of Savage* which made him famous. This led to his great work of compiling a *Dictionary* of English. Save for some amanuenses, he completed it singlehanded, though it took him eight years. This work evoked at last the belated patronage of Lord Chesterfield. In a famous letter to him Johnson rejected the patron, and with that the patronage of letters passed into the hands of the public.

While the lexicon was in progress, Johnson published the poem *Vanity of Human Wishes*, in imitation of Juvenal. He wrote a series of essays which are now known as *Rambler* (1750). After the *Dictionary* (1755), he wrote some essays to a paper he started, the *Idler* (1758). These essays are of an ethical and religious nature. To meet the funeral expenses of his mother he wrote the alleg ale *Rasselas* during the evenings of one week.

These works brought Johnson to the notice of the authorities. The Government gave him a pension of £ 300 a year. He received subscriptions for a good edition of Shakespeare. The money was spent even before the work was planned. Churchill's attack gave him the stimulus and the text of Shakespeare was published in October, 1765. This edition is valuable for its readings and interpretations even today. These activities did not leave him alone for he was essentially a clubbable man. His circle of friends included great artists, poets, philosophers, statesmen and politicians. They formed into a club with Johnson as their president and met regularly in the Mitre Tavern. It was here that he revealed his tremendous gift for brilliant conversation ; and these conversations are recorded for posterity by the devoted James Boswell.

Boswell the man of genius came from Scotland and Johnson, who did not have much love for the Scotch, was deeply attached to him. Johnson was also acquainted at this time with Mrs. Thrale whose house in London and in the country made him comfortable. When Mrs. Thrale lost her husband, she married an Italian fiddler, Mr. Piozzi. This separated Johnson from her. He lived in solitude and reflection thereafter. During this period he wrote the famous *Lives of the Poets*, published in 1784. He was later attacked by hypochandria, and breathed his last on December 13, 1784. He was buried in Westminister Abbey "among the eminent men of whom he had been the historian", as Macaulay said.

Scrofula disfigured Johnson's appearance. Unwieldy bulk, scarred cheeks and defective eyesight were prominent in him. His walk had an awkward gait. He spoke spasmodically and ate raverously. He was never patient in company. He never allowed others to be vocal in his presence, the only exception being Edward Buske. And yet if he was loved and respected by every one, it was because of his moral and intellectual qualities.

Inspite of his desultory reading, he read extensively. As a lexicographer he read those periods of English literature which were held to be outmoded. He knew Latin literature, the literature of his own say, and the works of the seventeenth century very thoroughly. To this study was added a stupendous memory which could provide an apt illustration for any and every occasion. He had an analytical mind which

could discern the important and the significant, and which enabled him to argue succinctly and effectively. But in conversation he did not show off his scholarship. His charming manner of talk won for him devoted listeners and admirers. The talk was always that of a typical Englishman. He was the embodiment of the British public. As Bailey observed : "He is still for us the great scholar and, the strongly marked individuality, but he has gradually attained a kind of apotheosis, a kind of semi—legendary position, almost rivalling that of the great John Bull himself, as the embodiment of the essential features of the English character." Shakespeare or Milton cannot be taken as a typical Englishman. The British public do not find themselves in Hamlet, or Lear, or Clarissa, or Ravenswood, but they do in Falstaff, or The Bastard, or Tom Jones, or Jeaive Deans, or Gabriel Oak. They are all plain people, "with a certain quiet and downright quality which Englishmen are apt to think the peculiar birth-right of the people of the island. It is that quality," says Bailey, "which was the central thing in the mind of Johnson, and it is to his possesion of it, and to our unique knowledge of it through Boswell, that more than anything else he owes the position of the typical Englishman among our men of letters... In Johnson we see our own magnified and glorified selves." Johnson possessed the typical Englishman's commonsense, love of independence, scurpulous regard for truth, and sincerity which is frank and honest. The sturdy commonsense was the expression of his intense practical nature. He was interested deeply in life as it is here and now, not in life as it was in the past, not in life as it will be. This led him to reject the speculative philosophies and theories ; and so he claimed to have refuted Berkeley by thumping his foot on the floor. He could argue theoretically, but "he commonly used the bludgeon stroke of practice to give his opponent the final blow." This is the approach which most of us wish to adopt ; but we do not have the power of expression required for it. Johnson gave a permanent expression to our sentiments, attitudes, and beliefs. He may not have originated new or fine ideas. Collected the common stock of wisdom, tested it in life, found its truth logically and analytically, and applied it to a given situation effectively. The abstract discussion is made living by the "brief principle of general application." The plain sayings are never mere common places in his hands, "but things relishing

fresh life and experience" This gives him a great place in the history of letters.

Even in the days of oppress ng poverty, he maintained his independence. He spurned any offer of charity. There was the episode of his fattered shoes at Oxford. When on of the fellows placed a fresh pair of shoes at his door, he threw them out in great indignation. He rejected Lord Chestefield's belated offer of patronge, a rejection which, Barlye said, is the Blast of Doom. This sturdy independence also explains his great veracity. He spoke the truth without caring for the consequences. He told Macpherson that he was a fraud. He admits frankly the defects in his *Dicitionary*. As Bailey said, "Truth is his measure and honesty his knife." Another remarkable trait is his great sincerity born of his seriousness.

Johnson also wrote four political tracts. One is entitled "Thoughts on the Late Transactions respecting Falklands Islands" (1771). In 1773 he visited the Hebrides His account of "A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland" has to be read along with Boswell's *Journal*. One gives a picture of Scotland and the other of Johnson the man.

Johnson was not sensitive to the beauties of nature. He had weak eyesight, and a defective ear. He felt that "one blade of grass is like another" and he preferred the towns. His ear could respond only to the most regular beat of verse. He had a wide acquaintance with the Latin classics, and a less wide knowledge of the Greek works. He was more thorough with the revived artificial Latin of the Renaissance. He wanted even his epitaph to be in Latin. He knew little of the modern languages. Early in life he came under the spell of Dryden and Pope, and he also came to accept the neoclassic school in criticism. He was out of sympathy with the emergence of the new trends in English poetry during his day. Yet he had a sense of mystery, a romantic religiosity, a strong passionate temperament, and a "tendency to violence in taste and opinions."

2. Johnson As a Biographer

In the *Idler* (84) Johnson observes that "biography, of the various kinds of narrative writing, is that which is most eagerly read, and most easily applied to the purposes of life." It is the

practical value for living that attracted Johnson towards biography, though he does not offer merely biographical criticism. In the *Rambler* (65) we read : "It is not easy for the most artful writer to give us an interest in happiness or misery, which we think ourselves never likely to feel, and with which we have yet been made acquainted .....Those parallel circumstances and kindred images, to which we readily conform our minds, are above all other writings to be found in narratives of the lives of particular persons, and therefore no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistable interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition." The gaze was on the present and its root are in the past. A biographical approach then demands reflection, meditation, and thought.

The modern biographer is scrupulous about details. Johnson, however, offered new materials for the "Life of Pope" and he rejected them. The laborious researches of the biographers, he felt are too mechanical. As he said in "Life of Dryden :" To adjust the minute accounts of literary history is tedious and troublesome : it requires indeed no great force of understanding, but often depend upon inquiries." He was not prepared to go into the minute details of a person's life. Yet he told Boswell that "the biographical part of literature is what I love most." But a good biography for Johnson is that which tells us of the person's "studies, his mode of living, the means by which he attained to excellence, and his opinion of his own works."

A good literary biography, according to Johnson, must give the principal events in the life of the man, and it must study, his evolution as a poet. It would trace the studies, motives and aspirations of the poet. Thus it would be more a psychological study of the "many invisible circunstances" which he says, "are more important than public occurrences". The true man then is revealed more in his domestic life "where exterior offendages are cast aside". At the same time Johnson demands a strict adherence to truth and an accurate interpretation of facts and situations. Then the biography must present even the drawbacks. He observes : "if a man is to write a panegyric, he may keep vices out of sight ; but if he proposes to write a life, he must represent it as it really was". The biographer,

who seeks to palliate the wickedness or to varnish the vices, commits an offence against morality and against society.

Still Johnson's prejudices force him at times to sacrifice truth, as in his "Life of Milton". His indolence did not allow him to verify his own statements. But as Dunn remarked : "the same attitude of Johnson towards the panegyric element, the critical discourses united with the biographies, the clearness and straightforwardness of the style, the unity resulting from the idea always kept before the mind of the author that he was 'writing a life and not a death', all combine to make the *Lives of the Poets* worthy of a secure place in the history of the development of English biography".

Each *Life* in the *Lives* has a threefold division—biography, character and criticism. He opens the *life* with a biographical account and it is followed by a sketch of the appearance and temperament of the poet. The literary life is raised to the level of a new critical height. He does not seek to relate the biography to the criticism of the works. Criticism might become a sort of appendage to biography. In both his interest is a moral one. But the method is fascinating because of a possibility of bringing the past and the present together and of projecting them to the future. He said : "whatever withdraws us from the power of the senses, whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings". A study of the past is capable of begetting a practical application of those experiences of manners, morals and values. Biography is, therefore, praised "as giving us what comes near to ourselves, what we can turn to use". The *Preface*, however, does not contain biographical details probably because Johnson's edition of Shakespeare included the biography written by Rowe.

3. Function of Literature or Johnson the Moralist

Johnson remarked, "it has been my principal design to inculcate wisdom or piety." This statement of the *Rambler* essays gives us an idea of Johnson's approach to the problems of life. Without any trace of bitterness or complaint, he writes in a resigned mood of calmness. The Rambler's philosophy may be stern, but it is spontaneously and sincerely expressed. The examples in the *Dictionary* show, as Boswell noticed, that

"he has quoted no author whose writings had a tendency to hurt sound religion and morality." The *Idler* group of essays records mournfully "the frustration of pleasure, the shortness of fame, and the lapse of friendship."

The main theme of Johnson's teaching is to draw our attention to the vanity of human wishes. This vanity is also the theme of one of his poems. *Rasselas* is a long essay on the same subject. "This work", it is well observed, "is rich in those qualities which sustain men in adversity or in the brink of despair, ; it seriously grapples with the harshest realities of the word, exposes the worst and most malignant, and then bequeathes to us a dower of faith and hope which at least reconciles us to what we cannot prevent." He argues that there is more evil than good in this world.

Sir Joshua Reynolds remarked that no one had like Johnson "the faculty of teaching inferior minds, the art of Rinking." We can add that no one taught better "the art of living," which, he said, was taught by books. His varied intellectual and social experiences reveal his sincerity, lucidity, and vigour. These qualities fitted him eminently for the role of a teacher of mankind. But this does not mean that he was a philosopher because he disliked speculation intensely. He knew and felt that life is real and that religion is not a kind of mysticism.

In the 19th *Rambler* he argues that since life is a hard reality, if one wants to succeed in life he must choose his vocation early. But the choice must be made in the light of a lofty ideal. One may fail in trying to realize the ideal ; but the effort is worth making. "Choose early, and you choose best." Then you can have "at least the praise of having endeavoured well." We should not be disappointed or dejected when we fail ; for, as he told Storhan, "Do not expect more from the world than it can possibly give." Like Browning's Rabbi, he said, "temper the ardours of youth with the experience of the world." These are principles known to everybody. But as Roscoe observed, "Johnson possessed the gift of extracting principles from details, and of stating them not merely as maxims, but as living truths." According to him, it is life that provides the basis of morality and tests it ; and it is also life which is the final test of literature. Books have vitality if they represent life.

This wisdom born of commonsense has also made Johnson represent the world as miserable. In his *Rasselas* and *Rambler* he preaches the vanity of life. His own early life was one of bitter struggle ; and he knew drudgery not only in his own life but in that of his friend Savage. Yet he holds out a ray of hope. One of the essays in the *Rambler* gives us the statement : "He that enlarges his curiosity after the works of nature demonstrably multiplies the inlets to happiness." There is a certain resignation to the inevitable.

He was satisfied with the surface of rings because he hated speculation and because he accepted religion, law, and the English constitution as he found them. He pleaded for brood, general truths, and he attacked the prominent faults of mankind. Merits and demerits do exist and he was not troubled about their causes. His observations or the existence of good and evil cover the subjects, motives, and actions of mankind. And these observations cover the problem of conduct "from the point of view of the plain man's thoughts and instincts"

Johnson paid more attention to the teaching found in literature. *Absalom and Achitophel*, he says, has many lines that are "irreligiously licentious." The *Essay on Man* is defective as an ethical composition. Shakespeare is in some places immoral and licentious. But since Shakespeare wrote according to nature, life, or experience, we can derive much instruction from his plays. He observes. "It is this which fills the plays of Shakespeare with practical axioms and domestic wisdom" ; and "from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence." At the same time Johnson is not prepared to admire the work only for its moral value. It must also please us appropriately.

Literature is a form of knowledge. It illustrates human nature and sheds light on it. The knowledge is not new, but the form in which it is conveyed is new. The pleasure we have comes from the recognition of general human nature in the varied characters and situations. The recognition is aided powerfully by the apt, lively and effective presentation.

He observes : "The end of writing is to instruct ; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing." He is more emphatic when he says, "the greatest graces of a play are to copy nature and instruct life." Instruction is moral instruction. This is

clear when he said that Shakespeare "sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose." Johnson admits that the poet must have truth to life and that he must also instruct. But life, he knew, is not edifying. That life is full of suffering of vanity is the theme of his poem and of his *Rasselas*. Then how can a poet do both ? If he represents life truly, he cannot be edifying ; and if he instructs, he must sacrifice life and plausibility.

This contradiction is the result of Dr. Johnson's inability to consider, as Leairs put it, the ways in which works of art *act* their moral judgments. He could not think that a moral idea can be embodied in a myth or a symbol. He misses the value of *The Tempest* and *Winter's Tale* for he takes them to be pleasant and entertaining only.

Still Johnson sought the essential feature of man in his rational grasp of the ideal. This ideal can be realised in literature, thought, or action. In any case the rational activity is ethical : "Virtue is the highest proof of understanding, and the only solid basis of greatness." Vice, on the contrary, "is the natural consequence of narrow thoughts." This led him to insist on the representation of the general or universal-nature of man in literature ; and Shakespeare is praised for so doing.

The ethical function of literature is fulfilled by the inculcation of truth. Johnson observed : "Books without the knowledge of life are useless ; for what should books teach but the art of living ? " It is the knowledge of "general nature" that litrature must offer, for great literature always gives us "just representations of general nature." Then the artist is "the interpreter of Nature and the legislator of mankind" and he rules "over the thoughts and manners of future generations." It is strange that these ideas find their best expression in Shelley afterwards. The goal set before the artist is lofty. And in *Rasselas* we read that the artist "must divert himself of the prejudices of his age and country ; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state ; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same." Purely personal feelings, local fashions and ideas, contemporary prejudices and opinions, and rules that have nothing to do with

the ethical ideals have no place in literature. A thing is good only if it is "consistent with truth and probability."

The function of the novel is "to teach the means of avoiding the snares which are laid by treachery for innocence, ...to give the power of counteracting fraud, without the temptation to practise it; to initiate youth by mock encounters in the art of necessary defence and to increase prudence without impairing virtue." His demand for poetic justice made him prefer a happy ending to *King Lear*. He was angry with the dramatist for not punishing Angels in *Measure for Measure*. But in the *Life of Addison* he admits : "since wickedness often prospers in real life, the poet is certainly at liberty to give it prosperity on the stage. For if poetry is an imitation of reality, how are its laws broken by exhibiting the world in its true form. The stage may sometimes gratify our wishes, but if it be truly the mirror of life, it ought to show us sometimes what we are to expect." Here we have the greater demand for reality only because reality is instructive. Usually he prefers the demand for morality. Richardson is better than Fielding on moral grounds Sterne is impious and obscene.

The Horatian "instruct or delight" gave way to the Renaissance concept of "instruct and delight". In the hands of Johnson, the function of art is to "instruct by pleasing." This formulation does not make Literature superfluous, as it is claimed by some critics. This formula helps Johnson in defending Shakespeare. It makes him speak with conviction because it is a formula designed to take both the intellect and the emotions into consideration.

4. Johnson on Life and Literature

Life for Johnson is a hard reality. Books have a life if and only if they represent life. The poet must present life truly and accurately. He would therefore praise Shakespeare as the greatest artist because he holds the mirror upto Nature : "This, therefore, is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life ; that he......may here be excused of his delinious excstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language ; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passio. s.

Johnson was primarily a critic of life ; and if he turned to the criticism of litrature, it was because literature is an important aspect or activity of life. Literature is to be tested and tried by life. Its appeal must be to experience. It is truth to human nature that we demand of literature. Its value depends on the effect it has on our sensory, emotional and mental activities.

He constantly appeals to a general knowledge of life and literature because he prefers life to literary conventions. He writes that "reason wants not Horace to support it." In the *Preface* he says that "there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature." The natural is the universal. It is life in its essentials. This preference for life makes him speak harshly against the conventions of the pastoral. Thus he was disgusted with *Lycidas.*

Johnson believed that "reason and nature are uniform and inflexible". This uniformity is sought in the psychological being of the persons addressed to by the poet. When he rejected a good part of the neoclassicist system, he was actully invoking the test determined by reason, nature, and experience. These are of ascending importance. A work of art is great, he would say, if the great majority of people say so. The greatness does not depend on the critisc's theoretical judgment. Tragic comedy is defended on the ground that it faithfully portrays the actualities of life. In life we have neither a pure tragedy nor a pure comedy. When he rejects the unities of time and place, he holds fast to the view that the stage is a stage only and that the players are players.

The people have a better sense of literary worth because we have here the "Common voice of the multitude, uninstructed by precept and unprejudiced by authority." Their verdict has an unpartiality and a spontaneous sincerity denied to the critic. Hence, "about things on which the public thinks long it commonly attains to think right." About Gray's *Elegy* he says, "I rejoice to concur with the common reader." In his *Life of Milton* he remarks : "that cannot be unpoetical with which all are pleased." The appeal is throughout to life, to common human experience. The same tendency to regard life as the basic and ultimate criterion appears in his remarks on diction. He observes : "It is a general rule in poetry that all appropriated terms of art should be sunk in general expressions, beeause poetry is to speak an universal language."

A story, he argues, "should be a specimen of life and manners ; but if the surrounding circumstances are false, as it is no more a representation of reality, it is no longer worthy of our attention." Boswell records him saying : "The value of every story depends on its being true. A story is a picture of either an individual or of human nature in general : if it be false, it is a picture of nothing."

Dryden spoke of drama as being "a just and lively image of human nature." Johnson praises Shakespeare of fulfilling this very definition : "Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature ....Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature ; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life." Shakespeare's characters "are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find." They, "act and speak" under the influence of the actual human "passions and principles."

Johnson made the significant remark, "nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature." The duty of the poet is to give pleasure. But this pleasure must arise from the accurate pictures of general human nature. This general nature is found in the many throughout the history of man. It is opposed to the idiosyncratic nature. What is common to all men is the most typical feature, and it alone reveals best the real nature of man. The real and the general are therefore synonymous. Human nature is here assumed to be unchanging, then the human nature in its essentials is always the same, whether it was Homer observing or Shakespeare observing.

The poet presents general human nature, not the concrete with all its peculiarities : yet he must offer a lively and realistic work. Shakespeare's characters are "men who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion." Even his dialogue "is pursued with so much ease and simplicity, that it seems scarcely to claim the merit of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation, and common occurrence." The impression we have seems to make the dialogue appear true to life. It has a plausibility. This correspondence

with life explains that Shakespeare does not have heroes who are like demigods.

Johnson's faith in life is so great as to make him reject the critical authority in favour of the authority of life. He said, "reason wants not Horace to support it." Again, "there is always on appeal open from criticism to nature." He is not prepared to respect those who "draw their principles of judgment from books than from reason." Truth covers from reason, but books may not give it. This truth is "the recognizable substance of life, with its natural passions and activities in their due proportions." There is also the truth of religion which guarantees moral truth ; and this is Johnson's ultimate authority. The reality of the religious truth makes him demand direct ethical improvement from literature. But at the same time the demand is very wide because it prevented him from succumbing to a contemporary or personal system of criticism. It enabled him to think and feel in terms of "life in its permanent and communal reality." It is the general or universal truth of life. It is life in its generic aspect and Johnson's endeavour has been to understand life. Into this understanding there enters moral behaviour. As the astronomer in *Rasselas* says, "to man is permitted the contemplation of the skies, but the practice of virtue is commanded." Shakespeare is therefore praised for his "just representations of general nature." General nature is life in its broad truth. The poetic imagination must not merely mirror life. It must bring this life "home to the reader with both novelty and familiarity." The peotic composition must "remind us, in an improved form, of what we already feel to be true of life." And he told Bewell, "we may take Fancy for a companion, but follow reason as our guide."

When reason is our guide and when life is a hard reality, the interest of Johnson can be centred only on human nature, not on the physical world. "A blade of grass is always a blade of grass ....Men and women are my subjects of inquiry ; let us see how these differ from those we have left behind." The intercourse with intellectual nature "is just the study of the ideals and behaviour of man." The knowledge of external nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great frequent business of the human mind," he observed in the *Life of Milton*. In its place he pleads for "the religious and moral knowledge" and for "an acquaint-

ance with the history of mankind, and with those examples which may be said to embody truth." The passion for truth and the passion for life make Johnson essentially a critic of life. Life is the great theorem to be proved and lived by us.

Johnson is a humanist, a christian humanist as that. The humanist finds an extra-literary value in literature. He does not stop with technical criticism. He believed that if the critic is not a critic of life and its norms, he fails in his primary duty. He was deeply concerned with the end of art. The means employed by the artist are subservient to the end we expect of art. The end is truth, as it was to be for Wordsworth too. Hence he remarked : "Books without the knowledge of life are useless : for what should books teach but the art of living ?" This is the knowledge of the "general nature" and great literature must after the "just representations of general nature." These representations are just only when they are "consistent with truth and probability." The emphasis on probability excludes the marvellous. The marvallous depends on pure fancy and it does not need study, knowledge or thought. Again, the poet must reject the particular, the scrupulous enumeration of the details. On this score the metaphysical poets have been criticised rather harshly.

The artist has to present rather the passions of men, which are uniform, than their customs, which are changeable. "This is Dr. Johnson's rejection of the contemporary vogue of the ruling passion." A ruling passion like romantic love is condemned on pychological and moral grounds. But in Shakespeare love is "only one of many passions ; and as has no great influence upon the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him." Elevating any one emotion would be an eccentricity, an abnormality, which common sense protests against.

Johnson distinguishes nature from custom. The letter includes many of the neoclassical rules which are "arbitrary edicts" and which are said to demand our "blind reverence." The "laws of nature" have a precedence over the "accidental prescriptions of authority." If the value of literature lies in the communication of moral or psychological truth and not in its technique or art, literature is an aspect of life. Then since this truth can be best communicated by some other

branches of knowledge, literature and the other fine arts become superfluous. This is the implication of the famous passage : "This, therefore, is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who mazed his imagination... ..may here be cured of his delirious extasies, by reading human sentiments in human language, by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions .....His scenes are occupied by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion ..... The dialogue of this author... ..(seems) to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation and common occurrences." Literature represents "things really existing and actions really performed."

Johnson actually rejected fiction in favour of life : "the rejection and contempt of fiction is rational and manly." He prefers truth ; and he prefers "domestic tragedy" to "imperial tragedies" because "what is nearest touches us most.". The pastoral poem is a fiction because the felt emotion, which cannot be disguised, is given a new garb. The insistence on truth makes him dislike ancient mythology, the fashionable romances, and the out-of-the-way themes.

On the one hand Johnson wants literature to represent "general manners or common life" because "human nature is always the same." On the other hand he wants a realism and a moral function in literature. He loved life in all its particularity and at the same time he does not want the treatment of the particular in art. The neoclassicist and the realist are at odds. The former is a moralist and the latter wants life or reality. The third aspect is that of an abstractionist who wants the generic, the universal life, who wants species and not individuals.

What Arnold said of the critic is true of Johnson. He saw the world as in itself it really is and wanted it so in literature. In 17 8 he wrote to Langton : "Let us endeavour to see things as they are, and then inquire whether we ought to complain. Whether to see life as it is, will give us much consolation, I know not ; but the consolation which is drawn from truth, if any there be, is solid and durable ; that which may be derived from error, must be, like its original, fallacious and fugitive."

5. Johnson as a critic of Literature.

Johnson recognised that the ancient classical writers are infallible guides in literary problems because their works were based on nature and reason. Then the best interpreters of the practice of the ancients are Aristotle and Horace. But he was not prepared to accept the authority of any critic blindly. Any critical theory, he felt, must be tested and tried by life. Literature is to be evaluated not by appealing to the authority of a critic, but by appealing to experience itself. It is truth to human nature that must be sought in Literature. At the same time the value of a work depends on the effect it has on man's mental, emotional, and sensory activities. In helping us to understand literature in this light that we seek the aid of reason. Truth to life and appeal to experience are the two cardinal tenets of Johnson's criticism of literature.

Truth to life or nature helped him in getting rid of some classicist rules. As he said in *Rambler* (156) : "It might be the first endeavour of a writer to distinguish nature from custom ; or that which is established because it is right, from that which is right because it is established." The first is a rule based on reason and experience, while the second demands blind obedience to authority. The second was the basic tenet of the French neoclassicism and Johnson rejected it. Thus he wrote in *Rambler* (158) that the rules received from the critics of the neoclassical school "will be found upon examination the arbitrary edicts of legislators, authorised only by themselves."

The rules based on reason do accomodate certain conventions because the actuality of life is other than the dramatic presentation of life. As he put it in the *Preface* : "The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players." Then the judgment of the spectator is bound to be the correct are in the long run. Judgment of time cannot be brushed aside. If a work has been popular with the people over a long period, it is "adequate to our faculties and agreeable nature." Hence in the *Rambler* (52) he asserts that "the common voice of the multitude uninstructed by precept, and unprejudiced by authority........ in questions that relate to the heart of man, is, in my opinion, more decisive than the learning of Lipsius." In later life he wrote : "by the commonsense

of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtility and the dogmatism of learning, must be decided all claim to poetical honours."

We expect from the critic truth to experience. He must sincerely tell us his own deep reactions. Such was his criticism of *Samson Agonistes* in the *Rambler.* He expresses a fearless zest for truth and he is free from the fads of the times. The appeal to human nature and experience made him at times indulge in a narrow and inflexible interpretation of human tastes. Human nature may be unalterable ; but he ignores the complexity of human nature and the varied forces that sway it. This is because he took himself to be a good specimen of human nature. This was exactly the fallacy of the classicist. Working by a different route he approaches the neoclassicist. Instead of his rules, Johnson has life, experience and the public.

Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* defines and illustrates the critical principles he built up for himself during his life of reading, thinking and writing. The passion for truth is the strongest guiding principle in his criticism. Thus he presents an unsurpassed analysis of Dryden's intellect, and judges him as a man rather harshly. He does not claim a very high place for Pope, though he is pleading for the recognition of Pope as a true poet. He censures Pope's *Essay on Man* for its "penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment." In his presentation of the vices of the metaphysical school of poetry he is typical of his age. In the *Life of Milton* we find him at his best and also at his worst. As a Jory and as a Churshman he cannot sympathise with Milton. He was not sensitive to the beauty of *Lycidas* as the rational ground of the improbability of a genuine passion putting on a pastoral guise. But he is sympathetic and tender in relating Milton's old age. His praise of Paradise Lost is genuine and so is his account of Milton's diction and versification. It is not the neoclassical voice that we have here, but a reasoned and well thought-out approach to literature. His emphasis on clarity and his rejection of stiff embroidery did not allow him to praise Gray.

Like the neoclassicits, Johnson too did not have enough vocabulary of criticism. Some of his terms are all-inclusive and vogue ; He uses words rather carelessly his admiration of the minor works. Such are the words like sublimity, loftiness, and splendour.

In applying his principles to given works of art, he is a neoclassicist. He too divides a poem into fable, machinery, characters and the like. He applies the laws of the epic as formulated by Aristotle and modified by Bossu. Houston observes that the faults of such a criticism applied to Mitlon's Epic are, "first, a failure to recognise the splendid massiveness of the whole, the architectomic quality of the poem ; and, secondly, the complete lack of appreciation of the supreme human element in the beautiful pastoral idyll embedded in its central framework."

Johnson examines the structure and plan of *Absalom and Achitophel* and pronounces it to be defective. "The action and catastrophe," he says, lack "historical truth." He praises the machinery of the *Rape of the Lock*. The form of *The Essay on Man* is praised and its content is said to be puerile.

In the analysis of Dryden's wit, the comparison of Dryden and Pope, and in his estimate of Shakespeare we have a Johnson who is not a neoclassicist. The *Preface*, said Adam Smith, is "the most manly piece of criticism ever published in any country." Here is Johnson's ripest judgment on the genius of Shakespeare ! The *Preface* also has his famous attack on the unities, a strong defence of tragi-comedy, and a bold summary of Shakespeare's defects. There is no equal to it in sanity of judgment and reasonable admiration for the genius of a great poet."

This criticism is moralistic, dogmatic and too objective. It is a criticism lacking in a large imaginative sympathy. It is remarked : "Criticism of that type, the product of a well stored mind relying mainly on its own native powers and unbiased either by fear or favour, will always be challenging—and will always be needed. Such is Johnson's criticism at its best."

The distinctive feature of Johnson's view to treat the natural as the Universal. He was not at heart a neoclassical critic. Hence he could defend Shakespeare's mingling of the tragic and the comic inspite of the neoclassical authorities. Again he rejected the validity and necessity of the unities of time and place. He accepted the unity of action and the single hero in a drama. He did not accept the necessity of having five acts in a play ; nor did he believe that not more than three persons can appear on the stage at a time.

Instead of applying the neoclassic tests of greatness, Johnson applies the method of Longinus, "length of duration and continuance of esteam." This test presupposes a set of principles other than those advocated by the neoclassicists. Johnson was not interested in the mere evaluation and judgment of literature. He wanted to create a better appreciation of literature and to this end he needed improved standards and methods of criticism. As he stated in the *Rambler*, the task of criticism is "to distinguish those means of pleasing which depend on known causes and rational deduction from the nameless and inexplicable elegances which appeal wholly to the fancy, from which we feel delight but know not how they produce it, and which may well be termed the enchantness of the soul." Then the literary judgments must be freed from "the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription."

He rejects the neoclassicist theory of imitation by stating that "no man ever yet became great by imitation" (*Rambler*.) The works of art cannot be classified into kinds and as such a Shakespeare could combine the tragic and the comic. This is because the artistic imagination recognises no limits or restraints : "every new genius produces some innovation which ... subverts the rules which the practice of forgoing authors had established." The rules are not "drawn from any settled principle," and they are not" adapted to the natural and invariable constitution of things." The rules based on reason or necessity are in conformity "to the order of Nature and the operations of the intellect" ; other rules based on precedents can be questioned and modified. He prefers a rule "which is established because it is right" to a rule "which is right only because it is established."

Johnson also accepts Dryden's historical method. It is the method of judging an anothor by the standards prevailing in his age. As he told Wanton in July 1756 : "You have shown to all who shall hereafter attempt the study of our ancient authors the way to success, by directing them to the perusal of the books which those authors had read .....the reason why the authors which are yet read of the sixteenth century are so little understood is that they are read alone." He hoped that his *Dictionary* would put an end to "some part of this ignorance." This endeavour is almost Socratic. If Socrates was

the first great humanist, Johnson was the second. Both were devoted to the discovery and communication of knowledge.

Johnson sought, as Keats said well, "to subvert accepted critical dogmas and to deliver literature from the fetters of prescriptive criticism." The concept of taste is handy to promote this endeavour. Taste is historical and relative, or as he put it in the *Rambler* (92), it is "relative and comparative." Then "it is the task of criticism to establish principles." Criticism is, therefore, meant not for the poet as the earlier critics held, but for the reader. His first duty was thus the formation and moulding of public taste. Refusing to accept the received definition of taste, he wants taste to be formulated on "the works which have stood the test of time." That is, the critic does not judge great literature, but great literature judges him and the reader as well.

The foundation of Johnson's theory is not the system of any earliear modern critic but the practice of the Ancients. In *Rambler* (156) we are told that "many rules have been advanced without consulting nature or reason." The practice of the ancient poets is nature, and reason is the historical sense. The rules framed by the neoclassicist are only specific rules which may taken to be generally stylistic. The real rules governing literature are those derived from the operation of reason. The most representative feature in man is to be found neither in the feelings nor in the inclinations but in man's rational comprehension of the ideal standards and ideal. This ideal can be realised through study, experience and mental effort. The duty of the critic is to reveal this rational activity to man. He does not teach, but reminds man of his rational nature. As Reynold remarked, Johnson "cleared my mind of a great deal of rubbish". This characteristic makes Johnson, in the words of Eliot, "a dangerous person to disagree with."

When Johnson rejects the marvellous, it is because the production of the marvellous does not need study, knowledge or thought. When he criticises the "metaphysical poets," it is their emphasis on the particular, on the detail, that irritates him. Too much particularity might rise to obscurity. Johnson believes that the first duty of the artist is to be perspicuous. The rejection of the particular also implies the condemnation of pedantry in literature. He could not

admire pastoral poetry because it deals with shepherds who do not have "profound or refined sentiment."

If the particular were to be rejected, then satire cannot be accepted because it deals with a particular age, society or person. The satirist does not write "as a being superior to time and place," and he "easily finds readers, and quickly loses them."

This point of view makes Johnson speak of Homer and Shakespeare as truly great poets. Shakespeare is the greatest poet of "general nature" ; for his characters are "not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of world ; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but upon small numbers ; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions." These characters act and react like persons of all ages and times, for Shakespeare "always makes nature predominate over accident" and "overlooks the casual distinctions of country and condition."

A work of art must present rather "the passions of men, which are uniform, than their customs, which are changeable." Then there can be no "ruling passion" or a rigid correspondence between an action and a passion. Romantic love is a case of ruling passion and Johnson laughed at it as being irrational ; and he condemned it as the ground that it is likely to corrupt human beings. Hence he condemned Dryden's *All for Love.* In Shakespeare, Johnson observes, love is "only one of many passions ; and as it has no great influence upon the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him." Hence the dramatist was able to present a balanced picture of human life without exaggerating or underestimating any of the essential aspects of life.

Shakespeare is a poet of nature, while the neoclassical poet is a poet of custom. The former presents something because it is right. The latter has "blind reverence" to the "arbitrary edicts." The "laws of nature" are followed by Shakespeare. The neoclassical poet follows the "accidental prescriptions of authority." The neoclassical critics selected only such rules "as happened to occur to their own reflection," and then tried to invest them with "the certainty and stability of science." Yet Johnson accepts the doctrine of emulating the predecessors.

He observes that "the early writers are in possession of nature, and their followers of art ; that the first excel in strength and invention, and the latter in elegance and refinement." The ancients are to be united not on the technical side. Imitation must be that of the fundamental motives and ideals embodied in the great works of the ancients. Imitation of the technique is the imitation of the accidental and particular aspects. This basic approach enabled him to defend Shakespeare against Rywer, Voltaire and others. The real Johnsonian approach appears in his observation to Fanny Burney that among the judges of her work "the first are those who know no rules, but pronounce entirely from their natural taste and feelings ; the second are those who know and judge by rules ; and the third are those who know, and are above the rules. These last are those you should wish to satisfy. Next to them rate the natural judges ; but ever despise those opinions that are formed by the rules."

Johnson accepted the unity of action ; and decorum which must contribute to probability and ethical instruction is accepted. Most of the rules he talked about are the classical and neoclassical rules of vocabulary, metaphor, and verification.

But he rejected the Aristotelian idea of fiction. He observed that "the rejection and contempt of fiction is rational and manly. This passion for truth makes him say, "what is nearest touches us most." Thence he prefers "domestic tragedy" to "imperial tragedies !" This again is a reason for his rejection of pastoral elegy, for here we have insincerity revealed by disguised emotion. Ancient mythology cannot be liked in literature because it is not true. He di.liked the mythology of Gray's *Bard*, Aeschylu's *Prometheus*, *Alcestis* of Euripides, and the allegory of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost.* Romances too are not acceptable because they single out an emotion and exaggerate it.

The unity of place is rejected by discarding the neoclassicist assumption of stage illusion. Tragicomedy is depended on the basis of realism. The neoclassical idea of decorum is accepted. The humanist's preoccupation with ethical ideals and values is emphasised over and over again. He approaches the questions of figures, diction and versification as a ration-

alist ; and these are only matters of style or technique, not those fundamental to the very nature of art.

The great promise of the *Preface* is based on the idea expressed in the words : "The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest ; but the pleasures of sudden wonder as soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth." This stability must be harmonised with novelty and originality ; and it is possible to an artist who has an insight and a deep understanding of the human situation.

Literature is based on life. But "since life itself is uncertain, nothing which has life for its basis can boast much stability." If we try to "circumscribe poetry by a definition," it "will only show the narrowness of the definer." The variety, the immensity, and the complexity of life give enough scope for a variety of differing opinions regarding poetry. These differing views are not faulty. They are partial truths. Then a difference in regarding to the approaches to poetry does not imply a contradiction. This is because of what Johnson calls "contrariety of taste," not "of principles." But he knew better than his critics that performance in literature precedes precept. If the neoclassic rules are opposed to the Shakespeare, but with the rules.

The conflicting views of the critics, he says, are the result of an unnatural division between the two essential elements of human experience. One is the experiencing subject, and the other the world outside. If experience is a unity, there can be no room for the contradictory approaches. More objectively, he says : "That book is good in vain which the reader throws away." Here is the Larginian concept of the great book forcing the reader to approach it over and over again ; and it foreshadows an element of the Romantic criticism.

Johnson's catholic outlook in literature made him search for originality and novelty in the writings of the eighteenth century. He sought not to condemn but to see whether there is any beauty.

6. History of the Publication of Shakespeare

From 1745 Johnson thought of publishing an edition of

Shakespeare. He began to execute the idea only in 1756. Driven to work by friends, he could see it published in 1765.

He published in 1745 anonymously a paper entitled, "Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth : with remarks on Sir Thomas Harmer's edition of Shakespeare. To which is affixed proposals for a new edition of Shakespeare with a specimen." Two years later he wrote of Shakespeare in the *Prologue* delivered by Garrick at the opening of the Drury Lane Theatre. In 1751 the *Ramblar* (168) had "his celebrated censure of the diction of *Macbeth* on the score of 'lowness' " 1753 saw his Dedication of Mrs. Lennox's *Shakespeare Illustrated.* Shakespeare was in his mind all these years and he did not give up his original idea of 1745. Yet he did not come out with an edition probably because,as Raleigh believed, Warburton's edition of Shakespeare was expected ; and Johnson had the greatest respect for Warburton.

In 1756 Johnson renewed his efforts, gave out his *Proposals*, started collecting subscriptions, and promised his edition by the end of 1757. In December 1757 he promised the public that it would be out in 1758 March. There was no publication even then and the subscribers were restless and indignant. His friends were worried and they succeeded in making him work on the edition in 1764 and 1765. The edition was published in October 1765.

Johnson told Reynolds that two things he could do successfully—writing an Introduction to a literary work, and writing the conclusion. The *Proposals* of 1756 cover the Introduction, indicating the duty of the editor or interpreter of Shakespeare. "The complete collation of the early editiors ; the tracing of Shakespeare's knowledge to its sources ; the elucidation of obscurities by a careful st dy of the language and customs of Shakespeare's time ; the comparison of Shakespeare with that of other great poets, ancient and modern—all this and more is promised in the *Proposals*".

When Johnson finally undertook the edition, his eyesight was failing. He had before him one edition by Pope with many unreliable conjectures, and another by Theobald which was fully acceptable. Johnson sought to restore as far as possible the readings found in the ancient texts. He restored many readings of the first Folio, and some of the Quartos. He

was the first to believe in the superiority of the first folio to the second. He said, "I collated them all at the beginning, but afterwards used only the first." He was candid to admit, "as I practised conjecture more, I learned to trust it less."

There are brief notes to the text, and these are of permanent value to any study of the great dramatist. Elton observed : "Those who have waded through the notes in any of the great American *Variorum* editions know that three names are sure to arrest the mind : they are those of Johnson, Goethe, and Coleridge. It is Johnson who often pierces to the sense of a passage." Raleigh states : "Johnson's strong grasp of the main thread of discourse, his sound sense, and his wide knowledge of humanity, enable him in a hundred passages, to go straight to Shakespeare's meaning, while the philological and antiquarian commentators kill one another in the dark, or bury all dramatic life under the farfetched spoils of their learning. A reader of the *New Variorum* edition of Shakespeare soon falls into the habit, when he meets with an obscure passage, of consulting Johnsons' note before the others. Whole pages of complicated dialectic and minute controversy are often rendered useless by the few brief sentences which recall the reader's attention to the main drift to remind him of some perfectly obvious circumstance."

Johnson's method in interpreting a Shakespearean passage is stated by him thus : "Not a single passage in the whole work has appeared to me corrupt, which I have not attempted to restore ; or obscure, which I have not endeavoured to illustrate. In many I have failed like others ; and from many, after all my efforts I have retreated, and confessed the repulse." Johnson's integrity, sincerity and truthfulness are the guiding principles. He admits that it is not easy to interpret Shakespeare. His famous account of the great difficulties of Shakespearean interpretation is valid even today. Some of the obscurities in Shakespeare have resulted from "the surreptitious and careless manner of the publication." The changing fashions in language have given rise to some. Some others come from Shakespeare himself. As Johnson said : "If Shakespeare has difficulties above other writers, it is to be imputed to the nature of his work, which required the use of common colloquial language, and consequently admitted many phrases allusive, elliptical, and proverbial ; to which might be added

the fulness of the idea, which might sometimes load his words with more sentiment that they could conveniently carry, and that rapidity of imagination which might hurry him to a second thought before he had fully explained the first. But my opinion is, that very few of his lines were difficult to his audience, and that he used such expressions as were then common, though the paucity of contemporary writers makes them now seem peculiar." Still these difficulties did not damp the enthusiasm of Johnson. He sought guidance always from his infallible commonsense. He may not have had a historical perspective to elucidate passages of a topical interest. But he was not a research scholar, not was he acquainted with the minor Elizabethan writers. Yet he was a moralist and he related the plays to the problems of life. of morality. He may have approached some passages with his own prejudices. But he is the best guide in understanding Shakespeare.

The proposals are charged with great self-confidence. With regard to the "obsolete or peculiar diction," he declares that he was better fitted than his predecessors because he did "consider the whole extent of our language than any other man from its formation." This confidence marks the edition and the *Preface*.

7. The earlier Editors

Johnson gives a just and impartial estimate of his predecessors in the work of editing the works of Shakespeare. He is not bitter or harsh. He states impartially the merits and defects of each editor, and not even once does he allow his prejudice to colour his judgment. Each editor, he admits, contributed to the improved study of the dramatist.

Rowe undertook the first systematic edition of Shakespeare. He was not interested in correcting, amending or interpreting the dramatist. He provided a sketch of his life and a preface praising him. Still he introduced many emendations. He did not make much noise on this score and later editors copied them and passed them on as their own. Johnson's work lay in drawing attention to the immense value of some of these silent emendations. This is great literary honesty.

The second editor was Pope who drew the attention to the corrupt nature of the text and who argued that there are

ways of correcting it. He collated the copies for the first time and restored many lines correctly. But he rejected what he did not like personally. This resulted in amputating the text without making it whole or wholesome. Warburton praised Pope for distinguishing the genuine plays from the spurious ones. But Johnson observes that this was done not by Pope, but by the first editors, Heminge and Candell, when they gave the first folio. Moreover, Pope did not have the high conception of an editor's responsibility. Pope spoke of the "dull duty of an editor" whereas an editor has to collate and to conjecture. Collation may be dull, but it is essential, and Pope understood only one half of the duty of an editor. Conjecture is anything but dull. The editor must have a rare power of hitting at the meaning of the author and of selecting the most appropriate reading out of many possible variants. Pope had neither the patience nor the diligence to do this. And he therefore writes : "Let us now be told no more of the dull duty of an editor." Moreover Pope was elated by his success in his literary activities. He expected that anything given by him would be accepted as final and athoritative. But when he saw that his edition of Shakespeare was not up to his own hopes and that there were many things left to be done by others, he was disgusted and irritated. As Johnson says, "he passed the latter part of his life in a state of hostility with verbal criticism." Johnson retained Pope's preface and notes because "no fragment of so great a writer should be lost." This may in part be due to the great esteem in which Pope was held by him.

The third editor was Theobald whose undeastanding was limited and whose learning was not much. Yet he was after rigorous accuracy and pursued it diligently. He collated a number of old copies patiently and sought to arrive at the correct reading of the text. Here he was remarkably successful. Vain and showy he expressed his findings boasting fully about his industry, diligence and insight. Omitting these boasts, Johnson retained his notes. Only one or two of his vain statements appear in Johnson's edition to draw the attention of the reader to the vanity of Theobald. In his emendations he owed a good deal to Warburton, and yet he did not acknowledge his debt or gratitude even ance. Theobald was more interested in opposing Pope. The vulgar praised

Theobald only because Pope did not court the favour of the public. Johnson, however, does not take the side of Pope but approaches the work of the two editors in an impartial manner. He gives due credit to the labours of Theobald, and draws from him the need for humility and modesty.

The fourth editor was Sir Thomas Hanwer, an Oxford scholar, who was very well fitted for the work of editing Shakespeare. He was well versed ; and he had remarkable powers of intuition which enabled him to guess the meaning of the author. He also knew well the customs, traditions and opinions of the age of Shakespeare ; and this knowledge he exploited to the full. With all this he was a stickler and re-wrote the difficult lines in a strict grammatical form. He did not realize that Shakespeare cared more to make himself intelligible to his audience, and less to be stictly grammatical. Hanwer improved the metre and versification, as Johnson says, "with the least possible violation of the text." But the worst thing he did was to introduce his emendations into the text. He ought to have mentioned them outside the text. Johnson has almost come to believe in the sanctity of the tradional text of Shakespeare. Whatever emendations may be made, as long as they are not final, they must be shown separately.

The fifth editor was Warburton. Johnson had the greatest regard for Warburton's learning and piety. He was therefore pained to find fault with Warburton's edition. Still as a conscientious editor, Johnson does his duty. Hurry and impatience are Warburton's drawbacks. Impatient of study and hard work, he accepted his first thoughts blindly. As a result the notes contain the most perverse interpretations. There are improbable conjectures. The profundity of the author is heaped on a passage that could not bear it. Where the meaning can be made out in a simple and plain fashion, he made it absurd. Only those notes that are beyond criticism were preserved by Johnson. In his preface Warburton declared that he has followed the "Campons of criticism" and "reviewed the text of Shakespeare." This statement evoked two bitter pamphletes. Johnson draws our attention to the avoidable acrimonious debates. A literary controversy must be kept purely at the intellectual level. It must not be allowed to rouse the passions and emotions. This is the voice of sanity and moderation.

Johnson speaks of the editors Upton and Gray. Upton's study of philology helped him greatly. Gray's mastery of old English authors enabled him in interpreting many passages in Shakespeare.

Thus Johnson admits that he is indebted in some way or other to all his predecessors.

8. Johnson as an Editor of Shakespeare

The last section of the *Preface* speaks of Johnson's own work as an editor. Here we have the best possible introduction to the study of Shakespeare.

Johnson was the first "to call criticism back from the paths that led nowhere" and "to suggest directions in which discoveries might be made." He put an end to the fantastic desires of the editors and critics to alter the received text. "He first stemmed the tide of rash emendation, and the ebb which began with him has continued ever since." If we want to correct the text, we must know which is an error, where the error is. But what appears to be an error to us may be only an obscurity. Johnson pointed out the various reasons for the obscurity of Shakespeare's text. The great caution with which he took up the task of emendation is an ideal worthy to be followed. Johnson may not have always hit upon the correct emendation, but he was guided by a sound principle.

The task of the editor is given a status and an importance by Johnson. It is no longer the "dull duty of an editor" as Pope called it. He presented the duties and responsibilities of this task and the qualifications required. He stressed the value and significance of collating the texts, the dangers of rashly arriving at emendations, and the necessity of notes. The editional work is shown to be as exciting as that of the creative artist. It can safely be said that since Johnson the work of the Shakespearean editor has become an important and respectable vocation.

He was impatient of the quarrels of the commentators and he spoke of the absurdity of their acrimonious bates. They are concerned only with words, phrases and passages. These may exercise only the wit, not their passions. It is likely that their

achievements in textual criticism may be forgotten soon, or mixed up with those of others yet to come. An intellectual controversy should be always kept at that level. If it rouses the emotions and passions, considerable damage might be done to the textual criticism of any author.

Johnson had the loftiest conception of a Shakespearean editor. He brought with him a determined will and a greater sincerity. He begins to tell us about his work with the words: "I can say with great sincerity of all my predecessors, what I hope will hereafter be said of me, that not one has left Shakespeare without improvement, nor is there one to whom I have not been indebted for assistance and information." This is symptomatic of the great broadmindedness that Johnson stands for. As far as possible, he claims, he acknowledged his obligations. Where this does not appear, the information belongs to Johnson himself. Literary honesty, scrupulous attention to the minutiae of textual exegetics, and devoted zeal to restore the text are all evident in this undertaking.

Johnson admits that he borrowed notes which illustrate and explain a difficult passage, which are judicial in pointing out the faults and virtues, and which are emendatory. If the explanations given by others are found to be correct, he retained tham as such. A few passages that needed an explanation are elaborately interpreted. This may appear as too much or too little. But he admits that it is difficult to decide in such cases how much an editor should necessarily give. It has to be left to the taste and judgment of the editor. Still he felt that there are many passages which he was forced to leave unexplained. Either passages are too difficult and obcure, or the reader must exert himself to understand them. His opposition to spoonfeeding is too wellknown.

Johnson admits that he could not be systematic in the judicial part of the notes. No reader would prefer his appreciation of the play anticipated by the editor or critic. Yet the reader has to be initiated to some extent. So he tried in this part only to stimulate the reader to make his own discovery of the beauties of the play. This is again the anti-neoclassical trend bearing the appreciation and judgment of the literary work in the hands of the diligent and sensitive reader.

Emendatory criticism is the most difficult one involving collation and conjecture. In order to collate the editor must

have as many different copies as possible. Johnson sadly admits that he could not obtain all the copies, though he made a diligent use of the available material. The second part of the emendatory criticism refers to conjecture. Here he has been careful. He could not trust it when he realized that he was making more use of it. The first transcribers of the text had the authorised text before them, and they could be more certain of their readings than those modern editors who had to depend upon their imagination. Hence he was extra-cautious in altering the readings of the early editions. It is more honourable, said the Romans, to save a citizen than to kill an enemy ; and, therefore, it is more virtuous to protect an early reading than to attack it. This point of view leads him to speak of the pleasures and perils of a criticism based upon conjecture. Conjecture has no principle as its basis, and it is always likely to commit a mistake. Yet it is highly fascinating waking one experience the proud joy of originality and invention. But a conscientious editor, we are told, should not be led away by this lure, and he should not give up conjecture merely because it is perilous. When it is conducted within limits and with great care, it can yield very good results.

There are other aspects of the editional work, and these do not call for any argument for or against, according to Johnson himself. In this connection Johnson admits that he took a few liberties in altering punctuation and in the disposition of the particles. He warns the reader not to depend on the notes blindly. And he concludes the *Preface* with the magnificent utterance : "Every work of this kind is by its nature deficient, and I should feel little solicitude about the sentence, were it to be pronounced only by the skilful and the learned."

9. The Preface

The most precious part of Johnson's edition of Shakespeare is the *Preface*. Approaching the dramatist from the standpoint of neoclassicism, he reveals the genius of Shakespeare, and at the same time he put an end to the idolatry of Shakespeare. Rymerp and Voltaire condemned the dramatist because he violated the rules of correctness. But Johnson rejects the extremes of neoclassicism and of idolatry. Johnson was

aware of the two approaches to Shakespeare. The followers of Dryden admired the mighty, though untutored, genius of the dramatist : "one of the points that emerge clearly from his criticism of Shakespere is that the character-drawing, the passions, and the poetry, are of more account in a just drama than the structure." There was Rymer, "the strict interpreter of the rules of Aristotle, and the exemplar of narrowness and pedantry in their application." Rymer attacked the lack of structure and the violation of the unities. While Dryden emphasised the subject-matter and poetry, Rymer was interested only in the form of the drama. Johnson prefers to follow Dryden in his evaluation of the content. When he comes to the form, he boldly asserts that the rules cannot apply to Shakespeare because he obeyed the laws of nature, not the laws made by man. Surprisingly enough this is the beginning of the modern romantic approach, and it comes from a classicist. There is also Johnson's regard for truth, and this does not allow him to be a complete romanticist. He is alive to the many defects and drawbacks in Shakespeare and he points them out. Johnson strikes the golden mean.

Johnson emphasises that the plays of Shakespeare are a faithful mirror of life. This is a principle coming from Cicero, and the method accordingly is neo-classical, though the interpretation is romantic. As Dr. Houston observed. "To Johnson, as to the whole century, just representations of general nature were the essential characteristics of the classical ideal, and Shakespeare appealed to all as the great poet of nature, who held up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. Neither his greatness as a poet nor his delightful romantic situations came first to the minds of the critics who regarded Dryden and Pope as the supreme expression of the poetical spirit ; they turned rather by preference to what they deemed his interpretation of human nature in terms of universal experience. Johnson, whose mind was stocked with principles depending on nature and truth as formulated by classical critics, and whose temper was essentially reasonable, found these sentiments too congenial for him to adopt any other approach to his poet."

He found that Shakespeare made ntaure predominate over accident, that he depicted the influence of the general passions, and that he successfully presented life in its native colours.

With his great genius the dramatist preserved the individuality of his characters. These characters are individuals who are "universalised into the type, whose actions and conduct may have their application to ordinary men and ordinary life." In this he obeyed the Aristotelian principle that art imitates Nature, and his art was formed by experience.

This position leads Johnson to contrast Shakespeare with the "barbarous romances" which are sensationalistic. Shakespeare offers characters who think, speak and act as the normal human beings in like situations. The dialogue is levelled with life because he "approximates the remote and familiarises the wonderful". He reveals human nature as it appears in real situations, and as it would be in various trials and tribulations. Here Johnson makes the dramatist acceptable to his own insistent realism.

The language of the characters is natural and as such truthful. The incidents determine the speech, and the speech agrees with the character. The dialogue has therefore ease and simplicity which belong to common conversation. The natural disposition of Shakespeare, we are told, was towards comedy ; and the dialogue in comedy is refreshing and pure. The characters are true to life and hence durable, and we have a truthful "discrimination of true passion". Here we have "a conversation above grossness and below refinement, where propriety resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comic dialogue".

Then Johnson turns to the weaknesses of Shakespeare. In this part of the *Preface* we have Johnson the neoclassicist and the moralist. He accuses Shakespeare with lacking in morality. He sacrifies virtrue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally ; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him ; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked ; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent of time or place."

Johnson attacks Shakespeare's anachronisms as violating probability. Decorum is upheld as he speaks of the futility of the "reciprocations ot smartness and contests of sarcasm". Shakespeare's jests, we read, "are commonly gross, and their pleasantry licentious"; and the dramatist had not chosen the best modes of gaiety. Propriety too has been ignored in the matter of diction, for there are "the exchanges of mere smartness in the comic dialogue, the inflated language and the set speeches in tragedy, and the excessive use of conceits and quibbles throughout his plays".

Then Johnson proceeds to discuss Shakespeare's lapses in dramatic composition. First, there are tragi-comedies which are neither tragedies nor comedies These plays "exhibit the real state of sublunary nature which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination, and expressing the course of the world". These plays are not in accordance with the rules. But "there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature". The end of poetry, he admits, is to instruct by pleasing. "That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes both in its alterations of exhibition and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life." The mingled scenes do "produce the intended vicissitudes of passion", and "all pleasure consists in variety". He therefore observes: "Whatever be his purpose, whether to gladden or depress, or to conduct the story without vehemence or emotion, through tracts of easy and familiar dialogue, he never fails to attain his purpose ; as he commands us, we laugh or mourn, or sit silent with quiet expectation, in tranquility without indifference. When Shakespeare's plan is understood, most of the criticisms of Rymer and Voltaire vanish away".

Johnson defends vehemently Shakespeare's violation of the unities. He accepts only the unity of action. The other unities are "the accidental prescriptions of authority". He compares "a correct and regular writer to a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, and the plays of Shakespeare to a forest with all its splendid luxuriance of verduse and of weeds and crambles".

Johnson draws our attention to Shakespeare's humanity and moral power, and to his great untramelled genius. This

approach did put an end to a good deal of underbrush, and it paved the way for the great Romantic critics. Johnson clearly marked the parting of the ways in the approach to Shakespeare. From Johnson onwards the critics are to interpret Shakespeare not on the basis of classical or neoclassical principles, but on the basis of sympathetic understanding.

The native critical vigour of Johnson and his prejudices are evident here. Yet there is compromise and there is reservation. He does not fully accept the neoclassic system, nor does he fully reject it.

10. Fusion of the comic and the tragic

Cautiously Johnson introduces the problem of mixing comic and tragic scenes in Shakespeare, and observes that this "deserves more consideration." Dryden too referred to this charge and answered it by referring to principles of variety and the spirit of the people. Johnson is more systematic in his examination of the problem.

Shakespeare's plays, he argues, are neither tragedies nor comedies if we take the terms in a technical way. They are a new kind of form. They represent the real state of life which offers a succession of joy and sorrow, of good and evil. Life is a mixture of these two aspects. The ancient dramatists selected one of these aspects and potrayed it dramatically, calling one a comedy and the other a tragedy. Since then there grew a distinction which introduced an artificial breaking up of the unity of life. Shakespeare refused to accept this artificial division and hence he introduced both the serious and the comic into the same play just as they are found in actual life. Then the Shakespearean play is much closer to life than a pure tragedy or a pure comedy. This is an argument drawn from realism, from truth to lfe. But the realism of Johnson is thoroughly unlike the naive realism of a later day.

But the rules nowhere allow such a mixing up of the two elements. Johnson admits it. But he observes that "there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature." It is truth to nature or life that Johnson's demands, not truth to the rules of a critical theory. If something is true to nature and if it fulfills the function it is intended for, then one can dramatise

it inspite of the rules. The rules are of secondary importance only. The end of all literary composition being instruction by pleasing, we have only to find out whether the Shakespearean play achieves this end successfully. If it does, then it is preferrable to the other variety of the socalled pure play because it is true to life or experience. As Johnson would put it, there is a twofold pleasure in such a play.

If a comic scene follows a tragic one and vice versa, it might interfere with the development of the emotions or thoughts. This argument, says Johnson, is faulty, though it appears to be convincing. The "interchange of mingled scenes seldom fails to produce the intended vicissitudes of passion." Moreover, a change from the tragic to the comic or from the comic to the tragic is a welcome change. The former provides the relief from the tragic tension, and the latter prepares us for the tragic emotion. This argument comes from Dryden and Johnson does not appear to hold to it very strongly, for he does not elaborately discuss it. Then again the audience is made up of different types of persons. Some may love the comic aspect, others the tragic, and yet others the transition from the one to the other. "Different auditors have different habitudes, and upon the whole, all pleasure consists in variety." Here the appeal is to the complexity of life, and life is greater and more important than a body of critical rules.

Johnson reminds us that in the times of Shakespeare the people did not have a rigid classification of plays into comedies, tragedies, and histories. It was the nature of the ending that determined the designation of the type. A tragedy could easily be converted into a comedy in those days. As such we should not judge Shakespeare by the standards of the present day. He must be judged by the standards prevailing in his day. This historical approach was not developed. The few observations he makes are not very encouraging to the times. Possibly he did not have sufficient data to work upon.

Shakespeare's practice has been justified by the test of time. But we come across a serious limitation in Johnson's approach when he observes that Shakespeare's natural disposition was towards comedy, that he had to struggle with his matter in his tragedy, and that his "tragedy seems to be still" while his comedy appears "to be instinct". He was actully fighting

against this very distinction and he is led into the error of Rymer.

Shakespeare wrote without having any models before him either of creative writing or critical writing. Since, according to Johnson, Shakespeare had to struggle hard with his tragic material he often sought a chance to introduce the comic. This would make the comic element in a tragedy look adventitious. Johnson himself referred to the relief from tragic intensity and this he forgets in the present observation.

The comic scenes of Shakespeare have retained even today their value inspite of the changes in the manners and language. These are the scenes where characters are presented as having been affected by passion.

The critics who refuse to accept the fusion of the comic and the tragic are those who forget that "all pleasure consists in variety"

11. The Three Unities

Aristotle spoke of the Unity of action in his *Poetics*. The Italian critics of the Renascence added the unities of time and place. By the Unity of time is meant that the action represented in a play must not exceed a "single revolution of the scene", if it were to take place in actual life. In order to make it more realistic the French critics of the seventeenth century wanted the time in actual life to coincide exactly with the dramatic time. The Unity of place means that the dramatic action must take place in the same locality or in contiguous areas. The Unity of action, according to Aristotle, implies that the action must be single. It must be a whole with a beginning, a middle, and an end which are related to one another according to the laws of probability or necessity. The later critics argues that an action is single if there is no sub-plot.

Castelvetro argued that these Unities are found in Aristotle and that the unity of action is dependent on the other two. The first English critic to challenge the unities of time and place as un-Aristotelian and unnecessary was Dryden. The neo-classicist of France considered the three unities essential and inviodable. Shakespeare ignored the unities of time and place

in all his plays except the *Tempest*. And yet the plays wer popular. Johnson and otheis could find delight and instructio in them even though the unities were not observed. Thei how are we to explain the rule regarding the unities ?

Dryden opposed the unities and yet he commended then where they were observed. Rymer condemned Shakespeare for ignoring them. Rowe attributed Shakespeare's practice tc the conditions of the age. Till Johnson came there was nc systematic defence of the practice of Shakespeare. Prior to the writing of the *Preface*, Johnson accepted the unities and followed them in his tragedy, *Irene*. Now he questions the very propriety of the rules governing the unities. He argues that the unities have given more trouble to the poet than pleasure to the spectator. As Bailey put Johnson's position : "The first breath of the facts, as known to every one who has visited a theatre, is brought to demolish the airy castles of pedantry : and it is shown that unity is required not for the sake o deceiving the spectators, which is impossible, but for the sake of bringing order into chaos, art into nature, and the immensity of life within limits that can be compassed by the powers c the human mind. The unity of action which assists the mind is, therefore, vital; the unities of time and place, which are apparently meant to deceive it, are empty impostures". "The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage and the players only players", says Johnson.

Johnson exempts the history plays from a rigid application of these rules because in the historical play the dramatist is expected to present several incidents in a logical sequence, thereby making the action appear as one and whole. This is the unity of action. The other unities ore not necessary here. In his comedies and tragedies Shakespeare did observe the unity of action.

When the spectator believes that the stage is a certain specific place, he will find the absurdity if he were to believe that the same stage is some other place. But Johnson correctly argues that the stage is only a stage. No one believes it to be Alexandria or Rome. If the spectator imagines the stage to be Athens in one scene, he can as well imagine it to be Rome in another, and Alexandria in the third. As we can imagine

different places on the same stage, so we can imaginatively bride the tnterval of time. The time taken in action is to be accepted as the actual time. The time through which a story is spread may be taken to pass between the acts. The spectator thinks that this movement of time is possible and therefore the drama moves forward. The drama moves by sympathy. That is, those who demand the unities are actually confusing a representation with actuality. A representation can have a set of conventions which do not appear in actual life. Here Johnson gives up realism and gets back to the classicism of Aristotle.

We have therefore many valid arguments against the unities of time and place, even though all authority is in their favour. But there is always an appeal beyond the court of the critic to that of nature or life. In the history plays, for instance, we demand that one secne inevitably follows another and that the characters are kept natural and distinct. Shakespeare observes this Aristotelian unity of action with a beginning, a middle, and an end which are related to one another according to the law of probability or necessity. Only, he does not show a strict coherence between complication and resolution.

When we witness a dramatic action we are affected. We do not imagine ourselves to be the actors or actresses. We retain our identity. We experience the dramatic situation from the imagined possibility of the misery presented. When this takes place, the dramatic action becomes convincing. The dramatic action revives in our mind the recollections of the actualities around us. Such actions are pleasing in the theatre if they are comedies, and they move us more in the study if they are tragedies. A play affects us equally well both in and out of the theatre. This is the eighteenth century bias looking forward to the Romantics. The preference for comedy belongs to the century, and the closet approach is not far from that of Lamb.

Johnson observes that we do not know whether Shakespeare knew of the unities. But he violated them accidentally and persisted in that habit He does observe only the unity of action. Here Johnson presumes too much. He admits that Ben Johnson was a close friend of Shakespeare. Then Shakespeare could have known about the unities from him. Moreover,

the text of Sidney was available to him, and Johnson declared that Shakespeare was a diligent reader.

The unities of time and place, he says, are not essential. If one writes a play following these unities, the play may become a literary curiosity. It would be a piece of superfluous and ostentatious art. But if one can write a play following these rules and at the same time preserve the truth to nature, he deserves praise. But as far as Shakespeare is concerned, Johnson asks us to remember that the dramatist was ignorant of the rules. This is not correct.

12. Shakespeare's Learning

Rowe and Dennis thought that Shakespeare had no learning, while Gildon, Upton, and Grey thought otherwise. The many errors in the plays and the infrequency of references to the writers of antiquity are taken to be enough evidence in favour of the first view. The others thought that Shakespeare was learned because the Italian sources of his plays and because of his use of Italian and French expressions. Ben Johnson said long ago that "Shakespeare had small Latin and no Greek." Johnson accepts this statement as correct in broad outline. Ben Johnson was the friend of Shakespeare, and he made the statement when Shakespeare's achievement was well known to the public. Hence there is no reason to doubt the statement of Ben Johnson.

If Shakespeare successfully imitated the ancients, it does not prove that he was learned in the works of antiquity. He may have drawn his materials from the translations or from others who treated similar subjects. When Shakespeare said, "Go before I'll follow," it was suggested that he was translating "I prae, sequer"; and when Caliban wished after a pleasant dream that "he cried to sleep again," it was said that this was a rendering of a passage from Anacreon. But Johnson argues that it was not Anacreon alone but every one must have had the same wish on the same occasion.

Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* was based on the *Menaechmi* of Plautus. But Shakespeare did not exploit the other plays of Plautus because they were not translated into English. It is quite likely that Shakespeare knew the other plays of Plautus,

because Ben Jonson spoke of "little Latin and small Greek." Only Shakespeare might have felt that they are not suitable for his purposes. If there are French scenes and Italian words, it does not mean that Shakespeare knew well these modern languages. He may have got them translated. But it would not detract from his gteatness even if he knew those languages.

Shakespeare was a great genius and a diligent reader. Many good books were available in English translations. Johnson misquotes Ben Jonson and makes Shakespeare having "no Greek," while in reality he had "small Greek." If Shakespeare lacked anything by way of books, he had tremendous powers of intuition. Even though there were no recognised plays of an excellent standard or rules of a critical nature, he was able to compose excellent plays. Evidently Johnson did not have a comprehensive knowledge of the Elizabethan drama before Shakespeare. Then alone can we explain his sweeping generalisation.

There are many branches of knowledge which appear scattered in the pages of Shakespeare. These may not have come to him from books. If one saw and felt life with open eyes, he could have got this information. Hence Johnson remarks : "He that will understand Shakespeare must not be content to study him in the closet but must look for his meaning sometimes among the sports of the field, and sometimes among the manufacturers of the shop."

13. The merits and defects of Shakespeare

John Bailey observed : "never certainly has the central praise of Shakespeare as the master of truth and universality been better set forth than by Johnson. Our ears are delighted, our powers of admiration quickened, our reasons convinced, as we read the succession of luminous and eloquent paragraphs in which he tries Shakespeare by the tests of time, of nature, of universality and finds him supreme in all." The collective judgment of the ages in relation to Shakespeare makes him a great dramatist.

Johnson states that love is not the only passion in Shakespeare and that it has only a little part to play. This might strike as odd, but it is true. We have only to compare Shakespeare with the other dramatists and then we discover that

there are many plays of Shakespeare where love is not a prominent feature.

Shakespeare's characters are strongly individualised. Each character is distinguished from the others. Johnson states : "no poet has kept his personages more distinct from cach other. I will not say with Pope that every speech may be assigned to the proper speakers, because many speeches there are which have nothing characteristical ; but though some may perhaps be equally adopted to every person, it will be difficult to find any that can properly be transferred from the present possessor to another claimant. The choice is right when there is reason for choice." The characters, however, act under the influences of the universal human passions and principles, thereby becoming a faithful mirror of manners and life.

Next we observe that Shakespeare "has no heroes ; his scenes are occupied by men who act and speak as the reader thinks he should have himself spoken and acted on the same occasion." This view was taken up in later times by Ruskin. The plays, says Johnson, present a system of civil and economical prudence. The men and women are real, they are taken from life, and they speak the normal language. "Even where the agency is supernatural the dialogue is level with life .... Shakespeare approximates the remote and familiarises the wonderful." Even if the events described be impossible, they are never improbable : for, Shakespeare was interested only in the revelation of human nature. "A poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition."

Regarding diction and style he observes : "There is a conversation above grossness, and below refinement, where propriety resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comic dialogue." He approximates his characters and sentiments to real life, and therefore he is convincing. We cannot transfer the speech of one characters to another because each reflects the specific characteristics of the person speaking it.

When Johnson speaks of the defects of Shakespeare, his is the voice of the English neoclassicism of the century. Shakespeare does not often show the socalled poetic justice. This would be a fault if literature should have a moral function. The plots of some plays are losely constructed. Some plays nd abruptly or in an improbable way. There are anachro

nisms which voilate probability. The reciprocations of smartness or stichomythias are unsuccessful. The tragedies are said to be at times tedious and obscure. The narrations are in some places pompous. The declamations are cold and weak. The sentiments are trivial and unwieldy. There is a love of fun, quibbles and conceits. These defects are listed carefully because Johnson is eager to show that he is not praising Shakespeare indiscriminately, that he does not have a blind veneration for the bard. As he told Charles Burnery : "We must contest the faults of Shakespeare to gain credit to our praise of his excellencies. He that claims either for himself or for another the honours of perfection will surely injure the reputation which he designs to assist.

The faults of Shakespeare enumerated by Johnson are the results of carelessness or of an excess of conceit. These faults may be the consequence of superabundant powers of genius. The faults are amply compensated by the virtues. This spirit dominates Johnson's defence of the mingling of the comic and the tragic, and of the violation of the unities of time and place. Johnson also points out the future lines of approach to Shakespearean interpretation. He shows that Shakespeare has more references than others to the traditions and superstitions of the common people. This necessitates a knowledge of these on the part of the readers. This line of approach has been tried in the twentieth century by Campbell and others. But we cannot say with confidence that such attempts enable us to understand the dramatist more thoroughly.

Johnson observers that "nothing can please many, and please long but just representations of general nature." This is the first virtue of Shakespeare that he is the poet of nature." This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life ; that he who has mazed his imagination in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be covered of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language." Shakespeare did not represent the particular habits of men, nor did he allow his fancy to guide him fully.

From Shakespeare alone we can make a complete book of axioms concerning life. To accept this as the major merit of Shakespeare is to fall a prey to the moralistic approach. But

Johnson's bias to the moral function is clearly evident throughout his treatment of poetry and drama. At the same time we read the indictment that Shakespeare wrote without any moral purpose in view because he was more anxious to please. There is no systematic teaching of moral precepts. There does not appear to be any disapprobation of the wicked. This Johnson attributes to the crude times in which the dramatist lived, and remarks that a great author must rise above his age. Even where there are opportunities to moralise, Shakespeare allowed them to go unexploited.

Still Shakespeare did represent and reveal human nature as its acts in real situations, and as it would act in situations which could not come its way. On this ground the charge of violating decorum was advanced by Rymer, Dennis, and Voltaire.

14. Johnson as a critic of Shakespeare

Johnson as a Shakespearean critic reveals the virtues of his own personal and reasoned approach to Shakespeare along with the vices of his age. The 18th century was seeking to modify the neoclassical theory of poetry and drama to suit its tradition and taste. The neoclassical school believed in the inviolable authority of the rules derived from the Greeco-Roman antiquity. A work of art was estimated in the light of those rules. The critic was a kind of judge about to pass a judgment praising or condemning the work according to the accepted standards. Their duty included the drawing of our attention to the defects in the work. Johnson points out the defects to show that his praise has beer impartial and sincere. Among the defects he mentioned the loose construction of some plots, the improbable endings in some plays, and the improper use of puns, quibbles and conceits in some places. Those defects are accepted by one and all to be ture. But there were other drawbacks he mentioned, and these are more the result of the critical ideas prevalent in the 18th century.

As a good neoclassicist he insisted that poetry must instruct by pleasing. Poetry must have a purpose. Johnson was an uncompromising moralist and he condemns a play if it does not exhibit the socalled poetic justice. But the criterion of instructing by pleasing also enables him to ignore the absence of poetic justice when he is bent upon drawing our attention to the other positive aspects of Shakespeare.

Johnson follows the neoclassicist in observing that Shakespeare's characters are commnonly types and not individuals. But as Hazlitt commented, "he in fact found the general species or didactic form in Shakespeare's characters, which was all he sought or cared for ; he did not find the individual traits or the dramatic distinctions which Shakespeare has engrafted on this general nature because he felt no interest in them".

The neoclassicist in England preferred comedy to tragedy. Johnson accordingly saw skill in tragedy and instinct in comedy. Even the tragedies of Shakespeare were rewritten as comedies in that century.

But there are other problems where Johnson moves along independent lines. The blending of the comic and the tragic was vehemently opposed by the neoclassicists. Shakespeare has tragicomedies and also comic scenes in tragedies. These plays do please us in spite of the rules. Dryden attempted a defence of these plays on the basis of the principle of contrast, and on that of the spirit of the people. But it was left to Johnson to vindicate Shakespeare's practice thoroughly and systematically.

The neoclassicist clung fast to the three unities and Dryden rejected the unities of time and place. Johnson takes up the problem and offers a valid account of Shakespeare's practice. His arguments have not been improved upon.

Dryden initiated in modern times the historical and comparative approaches to works of art. Johnson develops these points of view. In the *Preface* he observes, "Every man's performance to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived and with his own particular opportunities." This is true. But if he is intelligible only in that settings, what happens to Johnson's attack on particularity ? He states : "Shakespeare has more allusions than other poets to the traditions and superstitions of the vulgar which must therefore be traced before he can be understood". A study of these may not be very illuminating if the emphasis of the reader were to be, as with Johnson, on the "just representation of general nature". Evidently there is a contradiction in this approach, and it cannot be resolved. We are asked to find the dramatist's meaning "among the sports of the field". This might give a wider grasp of life to Shakespeare ; but it would conflict with Johnson's opposition to the treatment of the particular.

Above all critics it was Johnson again who has given us a full account of the sources of the obscurities in the text of Shakespeare. The duties of an editor of Shakespeare have been determined once for all. Some of the sources of difficulties enumerated by Johnson are : the ungrammatical style, the errors that crept into the scripts for players, the mistakes introduced by the scribes, the mutilations made by the actors in shortening the speeches, and the errors introduced by the printers themselves. Some difficult readings are integral to Shakespeare's "perplexed and obscure" style. They arise from "the fulness of Shakespeare's ideas", for "the rapidity of his imagination hurried him to a second idea before he had fully expressed the first". This is closer to what Shelley said later about the conflicting speeds of inspiration and composition. Shelley would accept Johnson's statement that Shakespeare paid greater attention to "the series of ideas than of words, and his language not being designed for the reader's desk, was all that he desired it to be if it conveyed his meaning to his audience".

Johnson's *Preface* also reveals his shortcomings. To say that Shakespeare's tragedies are the worse for being acted is far from the truth, if we do not consider only *King Lear*. That he does not observe poetic justice is negatived at least by the great tragedies. That he corrupted the language by "every mode of depravation" is fantastic.

Johnson's emphasis on a historical estimate is sound in principle ; for "every man's performance, to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived and with his particular opportunities". But he does not pursue the principle. He asks us to try to understand Shakespeare's plan. Since the poetry and the plan of Shakespeare could not be understood, he was praised for his characterisation. The Shakespearean drama is therefore, said to be "the mirror of life" ; it has "human sentiments in human language". As Eliot said, Johnson is "a nature if limited critic". As a nature critic he judges from a deep understanding of the human situation. But this judgment is limited to this situation.

Johnson insists that Shakespeare has not faithfully observed poetic justice, that he "sacrifices virtue to convenience", and that "he seems to write without any moral purpose". But as Leavis pointed out admirably, there are "ways in which......

all works of art *act* their moral judgments. For Johnson a thing is stated, or it isn't there". Johnson could not see that a moral idea could be embodied in a myth or in a symbol. But in his candid statement of the socalled defects we do find Johnson revealing his inability to be intimidated.

Shakespeare is great because he succeeds in achieving 'the first purpose of a writer". This "first purpose" is to excite "him that reads his work to read it through". This is the result of Shakespeare offering us not the subjective reactions but the grasp of "the living world". This grasp enabled the dramatist to present the "inexhaustible' variety of truth. The dramatic and other literary conventions embodied in the rules of the neoclassical criticism are the abstractions from ' the living world".

Even though Johnson dislikes to ' number the streaks of the tulip's and even though he is opposed to abstracting from "the living world", he does insist upon unity of impact, selection, economy, and decorum. But propriety, he says, has a thousand forms. As he said in the *Rambler*: "There are qualities in the products of nature yet undiscovered, and combinations in the powers of art yet untried". Then various forms of selection are possible and each one has its validity depending on its relation to life. This is the principle invoked in the defence of Shakespeare. Conventions then are to be protected from the tyranny of one variety of selection. If a convention is invoked to argue that Shakespeare's Romans are not truly Romans, Johnson has the better convention to argue that the exterior is not so important as the interior. The exterior is an accident and "Shakespeare always makes nature predominate over accident". Even Rome "had men of all dispositions" like any other city; and he was interested in presenting these dispositions because he did not pay attention to "the casual distinction of country and condition".

Johnson's approach gives a 'prominent place to the structural unity of a Shakespearean play. Though we can collect splendid passages replete with moral principles, the greatness of Shakespeare, he says, is "not shown in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable, and the tenor of his dialogue; and he that tries to recommend him by select

quotations will succeed like the pedant in *Hierocles*, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen".

15. Johnson's Style

Johnson is one of thôse who moulded and shaped English prose into a vigorous, forceful and effective kind of writing. English becomes manly in him because of his profound sincerity and of his love of truth. He condemned singularity frequently. A man who takes life and literature seriously is bound to write in a dignified and elevated manner. Such a manner needs the avoidance of the colloquial modes of speech, of the familiar modes of expression. But Johnson was interested not so much in expression as in communication. He wanted to be understood, to be looked to as a teacher. Then he cannot afford to appear pedantic. Johnson, therefore, chose the unfamiliar diction, not the strange and the foreign. He employs balance, inversion, antithesis and contrast. He uses the abstract noun in a peculiar way and he achieves compactness and brevity. These devices are so frequent in him as to make his style a mannered one. But he avoids giving this impression because it comes to us as the style of a vigorous genius.

Johnson's handling of language is so unusual that it impresses the listener. The unusual quality lies in a symmetrical arrangement of the clauses, in the "dislocation of the natural order" of words, and in a complex grammatical structure. There is "a more studied rhythem." He uses a large number of foreign or ancient words and he also coins words. Such a style was his second nature. In its extreme form it is called Johnsonese. He employed this language in his thinking, speaking, and prayer. If he writes pure Saxan, he comes back to his usual style quickly. He wrote to Macpherson : "I received your foolish and impudent letter............Your rage I defy." Here is plain speech combined with inversion. This style comes from Latin and from the English authors who imitated the Latin writers. Evidently his great model was Sir Thomas Browne.

Johnson had an amazing memory for words. Though there is a preponderant Latin element in his vocabulary, it has also a large native stock. In the *Preface to Shakespeare* (1768) we have the beginning of a homelier style. He frequently

employs balance in the structure of his sentences. We find balance in sound and also in sense. There is the sonorous amplitude of balanced structure in the *Rambler*. In the *Lives* the cadence is more varied ; there are many short, curt sentences. He also employs short comprehensive sentences.

A striking feature of Johnson's style refers to the construction of the paragraph. Abruptly he introduces a general principle, and then speaks of the circumstances to which it applies. Such a construction makes the structure of the paragraph look very much like an Aristotelian syllogism, though in Johnson the conclusion is followed by the two premises.

Then we have inversion which is an order of words and phrases that is not natural to English. He writes : "Your rage I defy" : "of tea what shall I say ?" Such expressions are mostly rhetorical. Though they were many round about the period of his *Dictionary*, their number decreases considerably in later writings.

There is also the infinitival subject in the sentence : "To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival, into the fable ; to entangle them,......... ..to make them meet ....is the business of the modern dramatist." Such passages are not infrequent.

Johnson wrote hastily and never blotted out even a single line. He carried in his brain an encyclopaedic knowlege. There were "vast stores of learning, observation, and reflection", and he proceeded, in his own words, "diffusing his thoughts into wild exuberance". Still when his *Works* were collected together, he reversed so scrupulously that "the alterations exceed six thousand." Even though he wrote the *Lives* in a hasty and dilatory way, still he wrote vigorously. He disliked a scientific approach and refused to go through the materials placed before him. For the composition of the "Life of Pope" he was given new materials which he spurted. He thought that he biographical researches are mechanical. As he said in the "Life of Dryden" : "To adjust the minute accounts of literary history is tedious and troublesome : it requires indeed no great force of understanding, but often depends upon inquiries."

Johnson's prose is not ornate. His desire to be compact and brief makes him have a sparing use of similes. But he has a strong liking for antithesis and he combines it with balance. This feature appears prominently when he offers a

succinct exposition of character and style. Take the sentence : "Shakespeare opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in inexhaustible plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities, and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals." The antithesis is not pronounced. But the balance is there. The alliterative sounds add to the balance in the development of thought, and the sentence is typical of the mature Johnson.

Johnson's earlier style was more Latinised. But the *Lives* have more Anglosaxan words than the writing of the present day. He informed Boswell that he added only four or five Latin words to the language. The latinisors come from earlier writers. He called the *Rambler* essays "too wordy." If he look up a latinism, it was the result of a love of the measured heavy movement and of a desire to depart from the simple movement of common speech. His best style begins with the *Preface* and its first note is simplicity.

This style has clarity. He concentrated on what he was writing and chose the most opposite words. Even these must be understood by the readers properly. He tells us many a time what he does not mean, and hence he uses contrast frequently. Thus he writes : "Shakespeare's familiar dialogue is affirmed to be smooth and clear, yet not wholly without ruggedness or difficulty ; as a country may be eminently fruitful, though it has spots unfit for cultivation. But in his hurry he fails to be rigorously accurate, to be scrupulously precise. This is the result of his dislike of vagueness. In *Rasselas* he laughs at the vagueness with which the word 'Nature' is used.

Seldom impassioned, he writes with the dignity of an outocrate, and there is a vigorous and commanding brevity in the style. Thus are born the general propositions like—"A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it" ; "His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instict" ; "all pleasure consists in variety" ; "Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature." Such sentences are truly aphoristic in character.

The stern moralising vein is subjected the humane considerations of the moralist. His reflections on the vanity of human life have a pathetic touch. Sorrow and sublimity do not move

his heart, but lead him to reason and to moralise, Such a mood characterises a sentence like : "There is no reason why a mind thus wandering in ecstasy should count the clock, or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field."

Johnson satirises and rebukes vices. But he is more a censor of minor weaknesses. Yet the tone is serious. He indulges in a bitter vituperation when he grows indignant. In a pleasant mood he has broad and arrogant humour. He is at his best when the object of humour is himself. His irony comes out when he refers to the sentence "Go before, I'll follow" as "this important sentence." A bitter, but gentle note appears in the sentence, "Notes are often necessary, but they are necessary evils." Instances like these are too many.

Johnson is incapable of a fine descriptive way of writing. He did not like even narrative prose. The narrative is subordinated to the moral and literary maxims. He does not present a persuasive exposition. It is rather dry and intellectual.

In one of the *Rambler* essays he states that he added something "to the harmony of cadence." Saintsbury agrees that he achieves a rhythmical character much better "than had been seen for nearly a century." The rhythm in Johnson's prose is dependent on balanced construction. There is balance between clauses, phrases, and words too. The sentences have proportion, decorous language, clear grammatical structure, mixed vocabulary, and periphrasis. It became an effective style for the expression of his thoughts.

Johnson's style moves in tune with his endeavour to grasp the final certitude. Ths famous letter to Lord Chesterfield has the image of "a man struggling for life in the water" ; and the entire sentence involves the bodily movements suggestive of a struggle to reach the surface. There is the whole experience of a man who struggled through poverty, physical ailment and the "drudgery" of preparing a lexicon. The thrust is incisive. When he talks of the lures of novelty, he has a style that endeavours after novelty. There is the balance of thought and sound, of vigour and order. The secret strength of this style lies in its verbs. This, says Eliot, is because Johnson, instead of writing like an orator, writes like one "talking in short breaths."

Johnson's Latinisms attracted the notice of the critics because he used out-of-the-way words round about the period of his *Dictionary*, and because he loved abstract nouns derived from Latin. The abstract nouns were necessary to him because he had to transform his experience into a generalisation or to communicate effectively and permanently a general truth. But these Latin nouns are kept alive by the association of verbs. There is also his habit of using vivid metaphor. The abstract nouns may appear static or dead today ; but they carry metaphorical overtones because they come from the various sciences and are put to a moral and psychological use.

Illustration and logical argument are harmoniously fused in this style ; and in this respect only Burke can be his equal. It is a prose deeply concerned with human problems or public affairs. It is not an academic exercise or a private confession. The style proceeds gradually fusing illustration with acute logical distinction. It is almost a dialectical progression. The abstract nouns are the words controlling the restless, energetic soul. There is a backward movement and a sudden thrust forwards. A typical sentence illustrating this proceedure is from the *Preface* and it can be arranged thus :

This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare,

That his drama is the mirror of life ;

That he who has mazed his imagination......may

here be cured...........

by reading human sentiments in human language,

by scenes from which

a hermit may estimate...........

Another instance is the following :

To works, however, of which the excellence is not

absolute and definite

but

gradual and comparative ;

to works
not raised upon principles
demonstrative and scientific,
but
appealing wholly to
observation and experience,
no other test can be applied than length of duration
and
continuance and esteem.

Johnson's style has life, vigour and clarity.

Books for Further Study

Saintsbury	:	History of English Criticism
Daiches	:	Critical approaches to Literature
Atkins	:	English criticism in 17th and 18th centuries
Wimsalt and Brooks	:	Literary criticism
W. J. Bale	:	Prefaces to criticism
,, ,,	:	From classic to Romantic
,, ,,	:	Achievement of Samual Johnson
H. A. Needham	:	Taste and criticism in the Eighteenth century
Ford (Ed)	:	From Dryden to Johnson
Watson	:	Literary critics
Weleek	:	A History of Modern Criticism, Volume I
Bailey	:	Dr. Johnson and his circle
Raleigh	:	Six Essays on Johnson
Elton	:	Survey of English Literature (1730-1788)
Allen	:.	Tides in English Taste, 1619-1800.
Hilles (Ed)	:	New Light on Dr. Johnson
Bentley (Ed)	:	The Importance of Scrutiny
Eliot	:	On poets and poetry

Hogstrum : Johnson's Literary criticism
Sherbo : Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare
Browson : Johnson Agonistes and other Essays
Chapman : Johnsonian and other Essays
Houston : Dr. Johnson, A study of 18th century Humanism
Roberts : Dr. Johnson.
Watkins : Johnson and English Poetry before 1660
Wimsalt : The Prose Style of Samual Johnson
Karl Young : Samual Johnson on Shakespeare.

TEXT

TO

JOHNSON : PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

SAMUEL JOHNSON

Preface to Shakespeare

1] THAT praises are without reason lavished on the dead, and that the honours due only to excellence are paid to antiquity, is a complaint likely to be always continued by those, who, being able to add nothing to truth, hope for eminence from the heresies of paradox ; or those, who, being forced by disappointment upon consolatory expedients, are willing to hope from posterity what the present age refuses, and flatter themselves that the regard which is yet denied by envy, will be at last bestowed by time.

2] Antiquity, like every other quality that attracts the notice of mankind, had undoubtedly votaries that reverence it, not from reason, but from prejudice. Some seem to admire indiscriminately whatever has been long preserved, without considering that time has sometimes co-operated with chance ; all perhaps are more willing to honour past than present excellence ; and the mind contemplates genius through the shades of age, as the eye surveys the sun through artificial opacity. The great contention of criticism is to find the faults of the moderns, and the beauties of the ancients. While an author is yet living we estimate his powers by his worst performance, and when he is dead, we rate them by his best.

3] To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative ; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientific, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test, can be

applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind have long possessed they have often examined and compared; and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour. As among the works of nature no man can properly call a river deep, or a mountain high, without the knowledge of many mountains, and many rivers; so in the productions of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind. Demonstration immediately displays its power, and has nothing to hope or fear from the flux of years; cut works tentative and experimental must be estimated by their proportion to the general and collective ability of man, as it is discoverd in a long succession of endeavours. Of the first building that was raised, it might be with certainty determined that it was round or square; but whether it was spacious or lofty must have been referred to time. The Pythagorean scale of numbers was at once discoverd to be perfect; but the poems of *Homer* we yet know not to transcend the common limits of human intelligence, but by remarking, that nation after nation, and century after century, has been able to do little more than transpose his incidents, new-name his characters, and paraphrase his sentiments.

4] The reverence due to writings that have long subsisted arises therefore not from any credulous confidence in the superior wisdom of past ages, or gloomy persuasion of the degeneracy of mankind, but is the consequence of acknowledged and indubitable positions, that what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.

5] The poet, of whose works I have undertaken the revision, may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration. He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as

the test of literary merit. Whatever advantage he might once derive from personal allusions, local customs, or temporary opinions, have for many years been lost; and every topic of merriment, or motive of sorrow, which the modes of artificial life afforded him, now only obscure the scenes which they once illuminated. The effects of favour and competition are at an end; the tradition of his friendships and his enmities has perished; his works support no opinion with arguments, nor supply any faction with invectives; they can neither indulge vanity nor gratify malignity; but are read without any other reason than the desire of pleasure, and are therefore praised only as pleasure is obtained; yet, thus unassisted by interest or passion, they have passed through variations of taste and changes of manners, and, as they devolved from one generation to another, have received new honours at every transmission.

6] But because human judgement, though it be gradually gaining upon certainty, never becomes infallible; and approbation, though long continued, may yet be only the approbation of prejudice or fashion; it is proper to inquire, by what peculiarities of excellence *Shakespeare* has gained and kept the favour of his countrymen.

7] Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representation of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.

8] *Shakespeare* is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by th-

rest of the world ; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but upon small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions : they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of *Shakespeare* it is commonly a species.

9] It is from this wide extension of design that to much instruction is derived. It is this which fills the plays of *Shakespeare* with practical axioms and domestic wisdom. It was said of *Euripides*, that every verse was a precept ; and it may be said of *Shakespeare*, that from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence. Yet his real power is not shown in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable, and the tenor of his dialogue ; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations, will succeed like the pedant in *Hierocles*, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen.

10] It will not easily be imagined how much *Shakespeare* excels in accommodating his sentiments to real life, but by comparing him with other authors. It was observed of the ancient schools of declamation, that the more diligently they were frequented, the more was the student disqualified for the world, because he found nothing there which he should ever meet in any other place. The same remark may be applied to every stage but that of *Shakespeare*. The theatre, when it is under any other direction, is peopled by such characters as were never seen, conversing in a language which was never heard, upon topics which will never arise in the commerce of mankind. But the dialogue of this author is often so evidently determined by the incident which produces it, and is pursued with so much ease and simplicity,

that it seems scarcely to claim the merit of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation, and common occurrences.

11] Upon every other stage the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed, and every action quickened or retarded. To bring a lover, a lady and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other ; to make them meet in rapture and part in agony ; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow ; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed ; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered ; is the business of a modern dramatist. For this probability is violated, life is misrepresented, and language is depraved. But love is only one of many passions ; and as it has no great influence upon the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet, who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew, that any other passion, as it was regular of exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity.

12] Characters thus ample and general were not easily discriminated and preserved, yet perhaps no poet ever kept his personages more distinct from each other. I will not say with *Pope*, that every speech may be assigned to the proper speaker, because many speeches there are which have nothing characteristical ; but perhaps, though some may be equally adapted to every person, it will be difficult to find any that can be properly transferred from the present possessor to another claimant. The choice is right, when there is reason for choice.

13] Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbolical or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unexampled excellence or depravity, as the writers of barbarous romances invigorated the reader by a giant and a dwarf ; and he that should from his expectations of human affairs from the play, or

from the tale, would be equally deceived. *Shakespeare* has no heroes ; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion : Even where the agency is supernatural the dialogue is level with life. Other writers disguise the most natural passions and most frequent incidents ; so that he who contemplates them in the book will not know them in the world : *Shakespeare* approximates the remote, and familiarizes the wonderful ; the event which he represents will not happen, but if it were possible. its effects would probably be such as he has assigned ; and it may be said, that he has not only shown human nature as it acts in real exigencies but as it would be found in trials, to which it cannot he exposed.

14] This therefore is the praise of *Shakespeare*, that his drama is the mirror of life ; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language. by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of passions.

15] His adherence to general nature has exposed him to the censure of critics, who from their judgements upon narrower principles. *Dennis* and *Rhymer* think his *Romans* not sufficiently *Roman* ; and *Voltaire* censures his kings as not compleetly royal. *Dennis* is offended, that *Menenius*, a senator of *Rome*, could play the buffoon ; aud *Voltuire* perhaps things decency violated when the *Danish* Usurper is represented as a drunkard But *Shakespeare* always makes nature predominate over accident ; and if he preserves the essential character, is not very careful of distinctions superinduced and adventitious. His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men. He knew that *Rome*, like every other city; had men of all dispositions ; and wanting a buffoon, he went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him.

He was inclined to show a usurper and a murderer not only odious but despicable, he therefore added drunkenness to his other qualities, knowing that kings love wine like other men, and that wine exerts its natural power upon kings. These are the petty cavils of petty minds ; a poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery.

16] The censure which he has incurred by mixing comic and tragic scenes, as it extends to all his works, deserves more consideration. Let the fact be first stated, and then examined.

17] *Shakespeare's* plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination ; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolic of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design.

18] Out of this chaos of mingled purposes and casualties, ancient poets, according to the laws which custom had prescribed, selected some the crimes of men, and some their absurdities; some the momentous vicissitudes of life, and some the lighter occurrences ; some the terrors of distress, and some the gaieties of prosperity. Thus rose the two modes of imitation, known by the names of *tragedy* and *comdey*, compositions intended to promote different ends by contrary means, and considered as so little allied, that I do not recollect among the *Greeks* or *Romans* a single writer who attempted both.

19] *Shakespeare* has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind, but in one composition. Almost all his plays are divided between serious and ludicrous characters, and, in the successive evolutions of the design, sometimes produce seriousness and sorrow, and sometimes levity and laughter.

20] That this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed ; but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature. The end of writing is to instruct ; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing. That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes both in its alternations of exhibition and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life, by showing how great machinations and slender designs may promote or obviate one another, and the high and the low co-operate in the general system by unavoidable concatenation.

21] It is objected, that by this change of scenes the passions are interrupted in their progression, and that the principal event, being not advanced by a due gradation of preparatory incidents, wants at last the power to move, which constitutes the perfection of dramatic poetry. This reasoning is so specious, that it is received as true even by those who in daily experience feel it to be false. The interchanges of mingled scenes seldom fail to produce the intended vicissitudes of passion. Fiction cannot move so much, but that the attention may be easily transferred ; and though it must be allowed that pleasing melancholy be sometimes interrupted by unwelcome levity, yet let it be considered likewise, that melancholy is often not pleasing, and that the disturbance of one man may be the relief of another ; that different auditors have different habitudes ; and that, upon the whole, all pleasure consists in variety.

22] The players, who in their edition divided our author's works into comedies, histories, and tragedies, seem not to have distinguished the three kinds by any very exact or definite ideas.

23] An action which ended happily to the principal persons, however serious or distressful through its intermediate incidents, in their opinion, constituted a comedy. This idea of a comedy continued long amongst us ; and plays were written, which, by changing the catastrophe, were tragedies today, and comedies tomorrow.

24] Tragedy was not in those times a poem of more general dignity or elevation than comedy ; it required only a calamitous conclusion, with which the common criticism of that age was satisfied, whatever lighter pleasure it afforded in its progress.

25] History was a series of actions, with no other than chronological succession, independent on each other, and without any tendency to introduce or regulate the conclusion. It is not always very nicely distinguished from tragedy. There is not much nearer approach to unity of action in the tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra*, than in the history of *Richard the Second.* But a history might be continued through many plays ; as it had no plan, it had no limits.

26] Through all these denominations of the drama, *Shakespeare's* mode of composition is the same ; an interchange of seriousness and merriment, by which the mind is softened at one time, and exhilarated at another. But whatever be his purpose, whether to gladden or depress, or to conduct the story, without vehemence or emotion, through tracts of easy and familiar dialogue, he never fails to attain his purpose ; as he commands us, we laugh or mourn, or sit silent with quiet expectation, in tranquility without indifference.

27] When *Shakespeare's* plan is understood, most of the criticisms of *Rhymer* and *Voltaire* vanish away. The play of *Hamlet* is opened, without impropriety, by two sentinels ; *Iago* bellows at *Brabantio's* window, without injury to the scheme of the play, though in terms which a modern audience would not easily endure ; the character of *Polonius* is seasonable and useful; and the Grave-diggers themselves may be heard with applause.

28] *Shakespeare* engaged in dramatic poetry with the world open before him ; the rules of the ancients were yet known to few ; the public judgement was unformed ; he had no example of such fame as might force him upon imitation, nor critics of such authority as might restrain his extravagance : He therefore indulged his natural disposition, and his disposition, as *Rhymer* has remarked, led him to comedy. In tragedy he often writes, with great appearance of toil and study, what is written at last with little felicity ; but in his comic scenes, he seems to produce without labour, what no labour can improve. In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comic ; but in comedy he seems to repose, or to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature. In his tragic scenes there is always something wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language, and his tragedy for the greater part by incident and action. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.

29] The force of his comic scenes has suffered little diminution from the changes made by a century and a half, in manners or in words. As his personages act upon principles arising from genuine passion, very little modified by particular forms, their pleasures and vexations are communicable to all times and to all places ; they are natural, and therefore durable the adventitious peculiarities of personal habits are only super-

ficial dyes, bright and pleasing for a little while, yet soon fading to a dim tinct, without any remains of former lustre ; but the discriminations of true passion are the colours of nature ; they pervade the whole mass, and can only perish with the body that exhibits them. The accidental compositions of heterogeneous modes are dissolved by the chance which combined them; but the uniform simplicity of primitive qualities neither admits increase, nor suffers decay. The sand heaped by one flood is scattered by another, but the rock always continues in its place. The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of *Shakespeare*.

30] If there be, what I believe there is, in every nation, a style which never becomes obsolete, a certain mode of phraseology so consonant and congenial to the analogy and principles of its respective language as to remain settled and unaltered ; this style is probably to be sought in the common intercourse of life, among those who speak only to be understood, without ambition of elegance. The polite are always catching modish innovations, and the learned depart from established forms of speech, in hope of finding or making better ; those who wish for distinction forsake the vulgar, when the vulgar is right ; but there is a conversation above grossness and below refinement, where propriety resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comic dialogue. He is therefore more agreeable to the ears of the present age any than other author equally remote, and among his other excellencies deserves to be studied as one of the original masters of our language.

31] These observations are to be considered not as unexceptionably constant, but as containing general and predominant truth. *Shakespeare's* familiar dialogue is affirmed to be smooth and clear, yet not wholly without ruggedness or difficulty ; as a

country may be eminently fruitful, though it has spots unfit for cultivation : His characters are praised as natural, though their sentiments are sometimes forced, and their actions improbable ; as the earth upon the whole is spherical, though its surface is varied with protuberances and cavities.

32] *Shakespeare* with his excellences has likewise faults, and faults sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit. I shall show them in the proportion in which they appear to me, without envious malignity or superstitious veneration. No question can be more innocently discussed than a dead poet's pretensions to renown ; and little regard is due to that bigotry which sets candour higher than truth.

33] His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally ; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him ; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked ; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place.

34] The plots are often so loosely formed, that a very slight consideration may improve them, and so carelessly pursued, that he seems not always fully to comprehend his own design. He omits opportunities of instructing or delighting which the train of his story seems to force upon him, and apparently rejects those exhibitions which would be more affecting, for the sake of those which are more easy.

35] It may be observed, that in many of his plays the latter part is evidently neglected. When he found himself near the end of his work, and in view of his reward, he shortened the labour to snatch the profit. He therefore remits his efforts where he should most vigorously exert them, and his catastrophe is improbably produced or imperfectly represented.

36] He had no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age or nation, without scruple, the customs, institutions, and opinions of another, at the expense not only of likelihood, but of possibility. These faults *Pope* has endeavoured, with more zeal than judgement, to transfer to his imagined interpolators. We need not wonder to find *Hector* quoting *Aristotle*, when we see the loves of *Theseus* and *Hippolyta* combined with the *Gothic* mythology of fairies. *Shakespeare*, indeed, was not the only violator of chronology, for in the same age *Sidney*, who wanted not the advantages of learning, has, in his *Arcadia*, confounded the pastoral with the feudal times, the days of innocence, quiet and security, with those of turbulence, violence, and adventure.

37] In his comic scenes he is seldom very successful when he engages his characters in reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm; their jests are commonly gross, and their pleasantry licentious; neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy, nor are sufficiently distinguished from his clowns by any appearance of refined manners. Whether he represented the real conversation of his time is not easy to determine; the reign of *Elizabeth* is commonly supposed to have been a time of stateliness, formality and reserve; yet perhaps the relaxations of that severity were not very elegant. There must, however, have been always some modes of gaiety preferable to others, and a writer ought to choose the best.

38] In tragedy his performance seems constantly to be worse, as his labour is more. The effusions of passion which

exigence forces out are for the most part striking and energetic; but whenever he solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumour, meanness, tediousness, and obscurity.

39] In narration he affects a disproportionate pomp of diction and a wearisome train of circumlocution, and tells the incident imperfectly in many words, which might have been more plainly delivered in few. Narration in dramatic poetry is naturally tedious, as it is unanimated and inactive, and obstructs the progress of the action; it should therefore always be rapid, and enlivened by frequent interruption. *Shakespeare* found it an encumbrance, and instead of lightening it by brevity endeavoured to recommend it by dignity and splendour.

40] His declamations or set speeches are commonly cold and weak, for his power was the power of nature; when he endeavoured, like other tragic writers, to catch opportunities of amplification, and instead of inquiring what the occasion demanded, to show how much his stores of knowledge could supply, he seldom escapes without the pity or resentment of his reader.

41] It is incident to him to be now and then entangled with an unwieldy sentiment, which he cannot well express, and will not reject; he struggles with it a while, and if it continues stubborn, comprises it in words such as occur, and leaves it to be disentangled and evolved by those who have more leisure to bestow upon it.

42] Not that always where the language is intricate the thought is subtle, or the image always great where the line is bulky; the equality of words to things is very often neglected, and trivial sentiments and vulgar ideas disappoint the attention, to which they are recommended by sonorous epithets and swelling figures.

43] But the admirers of this great poet have never less reason to indulge their hopes of supreme excellence, than when he seems fully resolved to sink them in dejection, and mollify them with tender emotions by the fall of greatness, the danger of innocence, or the crosses of love. He is not long soft and pathetic without some idle conceit, or contemptible equivocation. He no sooner begins to move, than he counteracts himself; and terror and pity, as they are rising in the mind, are checked and blasted by sudden frigidity.

44] A quibble is to *Shakespeare,* what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisition, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents, or enchaining it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal *Cleopatra* for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.

45] It will be thought strange, that, in enumerating the defects of this writer, I have not yet mentioned his neglect of the unities ; his violation of those laws which have been instituted and established by the joint authority of poets and of critics.

46] For his other deviations from the art of writing I resign him to critical justice, without making any other demand in his favour, than that which must be indulged to all human excellence : that his virtues be rated with his failings : But, from

the censure which this irregularity may bring upon him, I shall with due reverence to that learning which I must oppose, adventure to try how I can defend him.

47] His histories, being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws ; nothing more is necessary to all the praise which they expect, than that the changes of action be so prepared as to be understood, that the incidents be various and affecting, and the characters consistent, natural, and distinct. No other unity is intended, and therefore none is to be sought.

48] In his other works he has well enough preserved the unity of action. He has not, indeed, an intrigue regularly perplexed and regularly unravelled: he does not endeavour to hide his design only to discover it, for this is seldom the order of real events, and *Shakespeare* is the poet of nature: But his plan has commonly what *Aristotle* requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end; one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence. There are perhaps some incidents that might be spared, as in other poets there is much talk that only fills up time upon the stage; but the general system makes gradual advances, and the end of the play is the end of expectation.

49] To the unities of time and place he has shown no regard; and perhaps a nearer view of the principles on which they stand will diminsh their value, and withdraw from them the veneration which, from the time of *Corneille*, they have very generally received, by discovering that they have given more trouble to the poet, than pleasure to the auditor.

50] The necessity of observing the unities of time and place arises from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible. The critics hold it impossible, that an action of

months or years can be possibly believed to pass in three hours; or that the spectator can suppose himself to sit in the theatre, while ambassadors go and return between distant kings, while armies are levied and towns besieged, while an exile wanders and returns, or till he whom they saw courting his mistress, shall lament the untimely fall of his son. The mind revolts from evident falsehood, and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality.

51] From the narrow limitation of time necessarily arises the contraction of place. The spectator, who knows that he saw the first act at *Alexandria*, cannot suppose that he sees the next at *Rome*, at a distance to which not the dragons of *Medea* could, in so short a time, have transported him; he knows with certainty that he has not changed his place, and he knows that place cannot change itself; that what was a house cannot become a plain; that was *Thebes* can never be *Persepolis*.

52] Such is the triumphant language with which a critic exults over the misery of an irregular poet, and exults commonly without resistance or reply. It is time therefore to tell him by the authority of *Shakespeare*, that he assumes, as an unquestionable principle, a position, which, while his breath is forming it into words, his understanding pronounces to be false. It is false, that any representation is mistaken for reality; that any dramatic fable in its materiality was ever credible, or, for a single moment, was ever credited.

53] The objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at *Alexandria*, and the next at *Rome*, supposes, that when the play opens, the spectator really imagines himself at *Alexandria*, and believes that his walk to the theatre has been a voyage to Egypt, and that he lives in the days of *Antony* and *Cleopatra*. Surely he that imagines this may imagine more. He that can take the stage at one time for the palace of the

Ptolemies, may take it in half an hour for the promontory of *Actium*. Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation; if the spectator can be once persuaded, that his old acquaintance are *Alexander* and *Caesar*, that a room illuminated with candles is the plain of *Pharsalia*, or the bank of *Granicus*, he is in a state of elevation above the reach of reason, or of truth, and from the heights of empyrean poetry, may despise the circumscriptions of terrestrial nature. There is no reason why a mind thus wandering in ecstasy should count the clock, or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field.

54] The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They came to hear a certain number of lines recited with just gesture and elegant modulation. The lines relate to some action, and an action must be in some place; but the different actions that complete a story may be in places very remote from each other; and where is the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first *Athens*, and then *Sicily*, which was always known to be neither *Sicily* nor *Athens*, but a modern theatre ?

55] By supposition, as place is introduced, time may be extended; the time required by the fable elapses for the most part between the acts; for, of so much of the action as is represented, the real and poetical duration is the same. If, in the first act, preparations for war against *Mithridates* are represented to be made in *Rome*, the event of the war may, without absurdity, be represented, in the catastrophe, as happening in *Pontus*; we know that there is neither war, nor preparation for war; we know that we are neither in *Rome* nor *Pontus*; that neither *Mithridates* nor *Lucullus* are before us. The drama exhibits successive imitations of successive actions; and why may not the

second imitation represent an action that happened years after the first, if it be so connected with it, that nothing but time can be supposed to intervene? Time is, of all modes of existence, most obsequious to the imagination; a lapse of years is as easily conceived as a passage of hours. In contemplation we easily contract the time of real actions, and therefore willingly permit it to be contracted when we only see their imitation.

56] It will be asked, how the drama moves, if it is not credited. It is credited with all the credit due to a drama. It is credited, whenever it moves, as a just picture of a real original; as representing to the auditor what he would himself feel, if he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or to be done. The reflection that strikes the heart is not, that the evils before us are real evils, but that they are evils to which we ourselves may be exposed. If there be any fallacy, it is not that we fancy the players, but that we fancy ourselves unhappy for a moment; but we rather lament the possibility than suppose the presence of misery, as a mother weeps over her babe, when she remembers that death may take it from her. The delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more.

57] Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind. When the imagination is recreated by a painted landscape, the trees are not supposed capable to give us shade, or the fountains coolness; but we consider, how we should be pleased with such fountains playing beside us, and such woods waving over us. We are agaitated in reading the history of *Henry* the Fifth, yet no man takes his book for the field of *Agincourt*. A dramatic exhibition is a book recited with concomitants that increase or

diminish its effect. Familiar comedy is often more powerful on the theatre, than in the page ; imperial tragedy is always less. The humour of *Petruchio* may be heightened by grimace; but what voice or what gesture can hope to add dignity or force to the soliloquy of *Cato*.

58] A play read, affects the mind like a play acted. It is therefore evident, that the action is not supposed to be real; and it follows, that between the acts a longer or shorter time may be allowed to pass, and that no more account of space or duration is to be taken by the auditor of drama, than by the reader of a narrative, before whom may pass in an hour the life of a hero, or the revolutions of an empire.

59] Whether *Shakespeare* knew the unities, and rejected them by design, or deviated from them by happy ignorance, it is, I think, impossible to decide, and useless to inquire. We may reasonably suppose, that, when he rose to notice, he did not want the counsels and admonitions of scholars and critics, and that he at last deliberately persisted in a practice, which he might have begun by chance. As nothing is essential to the fable, but unity of action, and as the unities of time and place arise evidently from false assumptions, and, by circumscribing the extent of the drama, lessen its variety, I cannot think it much to be lamented, that they were not known by him, or not observed: Nor, if such another poet could arise, should I very vehemently reproach him, that his first act passed at *Venice* and his next in *Cyprus*. Such violations of rules merely positive, become the comprehensive genius of *Shakespeare*, and such censures are suitable to the minute and slender criticism of *Voltaire* :

Non usque adeo permiscuit imis
Longus summa dies, ut non, si voce Metelli
Serventur leges, malint a Caesare tolli.

60] Yet when I speak thus slightly of dramatic rules, I cannot but recollect how much wit and learning may be produced against me; before such authorities I am afraid to stand, not that I think the present question one of those that are to be decided by mere authority, but because it is to be suspected, that these precepts have not been so easily received but for better reasons than I have yet been able to find. The result of my inquiries, in which it would be ludicrous to boast of impartiality, is, that the unities of time and place are not essential to a just drama, that though they may sometimes conduce to pleasure, they are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction; and that a play, written with nice observation of critical rules, is to be contemplated as an elaborate curiosity, as the product of superfluous and ostentatious art, by which is shown, rather what is possible, than what is necessary.

61] He that, without diminution of any other excellence, shall preserve all the unities unbroken, deserves the like applause with the architect, who shall display all the orders of architecture in a citadel, without any deduction from its strength but the principal beauty of a citadel is to exclude the enemy; and the greatest graces of a play, are to copy nature and instruct life.

62] Perhaps, what I have here not dogmatically but deliberately written, may recall the principles of the drama to a new examination. I am almost frighted at my own temerity; and when I estimate the fame and the strength of those that maintain the contrary opinion, am ready to sink down in reverential silence; as *Aeneas* withdrew from the defence of *Troy*, when he saw *Neptune* shaking the wall, and *Juno* heading the besiegers.

63] Those whom my arguments cannot persuade to give their approbation to the judgement of *Shakespeare*, will easily, if they consider the condition of his life, make some allowance for his ignorance.

64] Every man's performances, to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived, and with his own particular opportunities; and though to the reader a book be not worse or better for the circumstances of the author, yet as there is always a silent reference of human works to human abilities, and as the inquiry, how far man may extend his designs, or how high he may rate his native force, is of far greater dignity than in what rank we shall place any particular performance, curiosity is always busy to discover the instruments, as well as to survey the workmanship, to know how much is to be ascribed to original powers, and how much to casual and adventitious help. The palaces of *Peru* or *Mexico* were certainly mean and incommodious habitations, if compared to the houses of *European* monarchs; yet who could forbear to view them with astonishment, who remembered that they were built without the use of iron?

65] The *English* nation, in the time of *Shakespeare*, was yet struggling to emerge from barbarity. The philology of *Italy* had been transplanted hither in the reign of *Henry* the Eighth; and the learned languages had been successfully cultivated by *Lily*, *Linacre* and *More*; by *Pole*, *Cheke*, and *Gardiner*; and afterwards by *Smith*, *Clerk*, *Haddon*, and *Ascham*. Greek was now taught to boys in the principal schools; and those who united elegance with learning, read, with great diligence the *Italian* and *Spanish* poets. But literature was yet confined to professed scholars, or to men and women of high rank. The public was gross and dark; and to be able to read and write, was an accomplishment still valued for its rarity.

66] Nations, like individuals, have their infancy. A peop newly awakened to literary curiosity, being yet unacquaint with the true state of things, knows not how to judge of th which is proposed as its resemblance. Whatever is remo from common appearances is always welcome to vulgar, as childish credulity ; and of a country unenlightened by learnin the whole people is the vulgar. The study of those who the aspired to plebeian learning was laid out upon adventure giants, dragons, and enchantments. *The Death of Arthur* w. the favourite volume.

67] The mind, which has feasted on the luxurious wor ders of fiction, has no taste of the insipidity of truth. A pla which imitated only the common occurrences of the worl would, upon the admirers of *Palmerin* and *Guy* of *Warwick*, hav made little impression ; he that wrote for such an audience wa under the necessity of looking round for strange events an fabulous transactions, and that incredibility, by which mature knowledge is offended, was the chief recommendation of writ ings, to unskilful curiosity.

68] Our author's plots are generally borrowed from novels and it is reasonable to suppose, that he chose the most popular such as were read by many, and related by more ; for his audi ence could not have followed him through the intricacies of th drama, had they not held the thread of the story in thei hands.

69] The stories, which we now find only in remote authors, were in his time accessible and familiar. The fable of *A. You Like It*, which is supposed to be copied from *Chaucer's* Gam- elyn, was a little pamphlet of those times ; and old Mr. *Cibber* remembered the tale of *Hamlet* in plain *English* prose, which the critics have now to seek in *Saxo Grammaticus.*

70] His *English* histories he took from *English* chronicles and *English* ballads ; and as the ancient writers were made known to his countrymen by versions, they supplied him with new subjects ; he dilated some of *Plutarch's* lives into plays, when they had been translated by *North*.

71] His plots, whether historical or fabulous, are always crowded with incidents, by which the attention of a rude people was more easily caught than by sentiment or argumentation ; and such is the power of the marvellous even over those who despise it, that every man finds his mind more strongly seized by the tragedies of *Shakespeare* than of any other writer ; others please us by particular speeches, but he always makes us anxious for the event, and has perhaps excelled all but *Homer* in securing the first purpose of a writer, by exciting restless and unquenchable curiosity and compelling him that reads his work to read it through.

72] The shows and bustle with which his plays abound have the same original. As knowledge advances, pleasure passes from the eye to the ear, but returns, as it declines, from the ear to the eye. Those to whom our author's labours were exhibited had more skill in pomps or processions than in poetical language, and perhaps wanted some visible and discriminated events, as comments on the dialogue. He knew how he should most please ; and whether his practice is more agreeable to nature, or whether his example has prejudiced the nation, we still find that on our stage something must be done as well as said, and inactive declamation is very coldly heard, however musical or elegant, passionate or sublime.

73] *Voltaire* expresses his wonder, that our author's extravagances are endured by a nation, which has seen the tragedy of *Cato*. Let him be answered, that *Addison* speaks the language of poets, and *Shakespeare*, of men. We find in *Cato* innume-

rable beauties which enamour us of its author, but we see nothing that acquaints us with human sentiments or human actions; we place it with the fairest and the noblest progeny which judgement propagates by conjunction with learning, but *Othello* is the vigorous and vivacious offspring of observation impregnated by genius. *Cato* affords a splendid exhibition of artificial and fictitious manners, and delivers just and noble sentiments, in diction easy, elevated and harmonious, but its hopes and fears communicate no vibration to the heart; the composition refers us only to the writer; we pronounce the name of *Cato*, but we think on *Addison*.

74] The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers; the composition of *Shakespeare* is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity. Other poets display cabinets of precious rarities minutely finished, wrought into shape, and polished unto brightness. *Shakespeare* opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in inexhaustible plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities, and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals.

75] It has been much disputed, whether *Shakespeare* owed his excellence to his own native force, or whether he had the common helps of scholastic education, the precepts of critical science, and the examples of ancient authors.

76] There has always prevailed a tradition, that *Shakespeare* wanted learning, that he had no regular education, nor much skill in the dead languages. *Jonson*, his friend, affirms, that *he had small Latin, and no Greek*; who, besides that he had no imaginable temptation to falsehood, wrote at a time when the charac-

ter and acquisitions of *Shakespeare* were known to multitudes. His evidence ought therefore to decide the controversy, unless some testimony of equal force. could be opposed.

77] Some have imagined that they have discovered deep learning in many imitations of old writers ; but the examples which I have known urged, were drawn from books translated in his time ; or were such easy coincidences of thought, as will happen to all who consider the same subjects ; or such remarks on life or axioms of morality as float in conversation, and are transmitted through the world in proverbial sentences.

78] I have found it remarked, that, in this important sentence, *Go before, I'll follow*, we read a translation of, *I prae, sequar*. I have been told, that when *Caliban*, after a pleasing dream, says, *I cry'd to sleep again*, the author imitates *Anacreon*, who had like every other man, the same wish on the same occasion.

79] There are few passages which may pass for imitations, but so few, that the exception only confirms the rule ; he obtained them from accidental quotations, or by oral communication, and as he used what he had, would have used more if he had obtained it.

80] The *Comedy of Errors* is confessedly taken from the *Menaechmi* of *Plautus* ; from the only play of *Plautus* which was then in *English*. What can be more pr ·bable, than that he who copied that, would have copied more; but that those which were not translated were inaccessible ?

81] Whether he knew the modern languages is uncertain. That his plays have some *French* scenes proves but little ; he might easily procure them to be written, and probably, even though he had known the language in the common degree, he could not have written it without assistance. In the story of *Romeo* and *Juliet* he is observed to have followed the *English* translation, where it deviates from the *Italian* ; but this on the

other part proves nothing against his knowledge of the original. He was to copy, not what he knew himself, but what was known to his audience.

82] It is most likely that he had learned *Latin* sufficiently to make him acquainted with construction, but that he never advanced to an easy perusal of the *Roman* authors. Concerning his skill in modern languages, I can find no sufficient ground of determination; but as no imitations of *French* or *Italian* authors have been discovered, though the *Italian* poetry was then high in esteem, I am inclined to believe, that he read little more than *English*, and chose for his fables only such tales as he found translated.

83] That much knowledge is scattered over his works is very justly observed by *Pope*, but it is often such knowledge as books did not supply. He that will understand *Shakespeare*, must not be content to study him in the closet, he must look for his meaning sometimes among the sports of the field, and sometimes among the manufactures of the shop.

84] There is however proof enough that he was a very diligent reader, nor was our language then so indigent of books, but that he might very liberally indulge his curiosity without excursion into foreign literature. Many of the *Roman* authors were translated, and some of the *Greek*; the reformation had filled the kingdom with theological learning ; most of the topics of human disquisition had found *English* writers; and poetry had been cultivated, not only with diligence, but success. This was a stock of knowledge sufficient for a mind so capable of appropriating and improving it.

85] But the greater part of his excellence was the product of his own genius. He found the *English* stage in a state of the utmost rudeness ; no essays either in tragedy or comedy had appeared, from which it could be discovered to what degree of

delight either one or other might be carried. Neither character nor dialogue were yet understood. *Shakespeare* may be truly said to have introduced them both amongst us, and in some of his happier scenes to have carried them both to the utmost height.

86] By what gradations of improvement he proceeded, is not easily known ; for the chronology of his works is yet unsettled. *Rowe* is of opinion, that *perhaps we are not to look for his beginning, like those of other writers, in his least perfect works ; art had so little, and nature so large a share in what he did, that for ought I know,* says he, *the performances of his youth, as they were the most vigorous, were the best.* But the power of nature is only the power of using to any certain purpose the materials which diligence procures, or opportunity supplies. Nature gives no man knowledge, and when images are collected by study and experience, can only assist in combining or applying them. *Shakespeare*, however favoured by nature, could impart only what he had learned ; and as he must increase his ideas, like other mortals, by gradual acquisition, he, like them, grew wiser as he grew older, could display life better, as he knew it more, and instruct with more efficacy, as he was himself more amply instructed.

87] There is a vigilance of observation and accuracy of distinction which books and precepts cannot confer ; from this almost all original and native excellence proceeds. *Shakespeare* must have looked upon mankind with perspicacity, in the highest degree curious and attentive. Other writers borrow their characters from preceding writers, and diversify them only by the accidental appendages of present manners ; the dress is a little varied, but the body is the same. Our author had both matter and form to provide ; for except the characters of *Chaucer*, to whom I think he is not much indebted, there were

no writers in *English*, and perhaps not many in other modern languages, which showed life in its native colours.

88] The contest about the original benevolence or malignity of man had not yet commenced. Speculation had not yet attempted to analyse the mind, to trace the passions to their sources, to unfold the seminal principles of vice and virtue, or sound the depths of the heart for the motives of action. All those inquiries, which from that time that human nature became the fashionable study, have been made sometimes with nice discernment, but often with idle subtlety, were yet unattempted. The tales, with which the infancy of learning was satisfied, exhibited only the superficial appearances of action, related the events but omitted the causes, and were formed for such as delighted in wonders rather than in truth. Mankind was not then to be studied in the closet ; he that would know the world, was under the necessity of gleaning his own remarks, by mingling as he could in its business and amusements.

89] *Boyle* congratulated himself upon his high birth, because it favoured his curiosity, by facilitating his aocess. *Shakespeare* had no such advantage ; he came to *London* a needy adventurer, and lived for a time by very mean employments. Many works of genius and learning have been performed in states of life, that appear very little favourable to thought or to inquiry ; so many, that he who considers them is inclined to think that he sees enterprise and perseverance predominating over all external agency, and bidding help and hindrance vanish before them. The genius of *Shakespeare* was not to be depressed by the weight of poverty, nor limited by the narrow conversation to which men in want are inevitably condemned ; the encumbrances of his fortune were shaken from his mind, *as dewdrops from a lion's mane.*

90] Though he had so many difficulties to encounter, and so little assistance to surmount them, he has been able to obtair

an exact knowledge of many modes of life, and many casts of native dispositions ; to vary them with great multiplicity ; to mark them by nice distinctions ; and to show them in full view by proper combinations. In this part of his performances he had none to imitate, but has himself been imitated by all succeeding writers ; and it may be doubted, whether from all his successors more maxims of theoretical knowledge, or more rules of practical prudence, can be collected, than he alone has given to his country.

91] Nor was his attention confined of the actions of men ; he was an exact surveyor of the inanimate world ; his descriptions have always some peculiarities, gathered by contemplating things as they really exist. It may be observed, that the oldest poets of many nations preserve their reputation, and that the following generations of wit, after a short celebrity, sink into oblivion. The first, whoever they be, must take their sentiments and descriptions immediately from knowledge ; the resemblance is therefore just, their descriptions are varified by every eye, and their sentiments acknowledged by every breast. Those whom their fame invites to the same studies, copy partly them, and partly nature, till the books of one age gain such authority, as to stand in the place of nature to another, and imitation, always deviating a little, becomes at last capricious and casual. *Shakespeare*, whether life or nature be his subject, shows plainly, that he has seen with his own eyes ; he gives the image which he receives, not weakened or distorted by the intervention of any other mind ; the ignorant feel his representations to be just, and the learned see that thay are complete.

92] Perhaps it would not be easy to find any author, except *Homer*, who invented so much as *Shakespeare*, who so much advanced the studies which he cultivated, or effused so much novelty upon his age or country. The form, the characters, the language, and the shows of the *English* drama are his.

He seems, says *Dennis, to have been the very original of our* English *tragical harmony, that is, the harmony of blank verse, diversified often by dissyllable and trsssyllable terminations. For the diversity distinguishes it from heroic harmony, and by bringing it nearer to common use makes it more proper to gain attention, and more fit for action and dialogue. Such verse we make when we are writing prose ; we make such verse in common conversation.*

93] I know not whether this praise is rigorously just. The dissyllable termination, which the critic rightly appropriates to the drama, is to be found, though, I think, not in *Gorboduc* which is confessedly before our author ; yet in *Hieronimo*, of which the date is not certain, but which there is reason to believe at least as old as his earliest plays. This however is certain, that he is the first who taught either tragedy or comedy to please, there being no theatrical piece of any older writer, of which the name is known, except to antiquaries and collectors of books, which are sought because they are scarce, and would not have been scarce, had they been much esteemed.

94] To him we must ascribe the praise, unless *Spenser* may divide it with him, of having first discovered to how much smoothness and harmony the *English* language could be softened. He has speeches, perhaps sometimes scenes, which have all the delicacy of *Rowe*, without his effeminacy. He endeavours indeed commonly to strike by the force and vigour of his dialogue, but he never executes his purpose better then when he tries to soothe by softness.

95] Yet it must be at last confessed, that as we owe every thing to him, he owes something to us ; that, if much of his praise is paid by perception and judgement, much is like wise given by custom and veneration. We fix our eyes upon his graces, and turn them from his deformities, and endure in him

what we should in another loathe or despise. If we endured without praising, respect for the father of our drama might excuse us ; but I have seen, in the book of some modern critic, a collection of anomalies, which show that he has corrupted language by every mode of depravation, but which his admirer has accumulated as a monument of honour.

96] He has scenes of undoubted and perpetual excellence, but perhaps not one play, which, if it were now exhibited as the work of a contemporary writer, would be heard to the conclusion. I am indeed far from thinking, that his works were wrought to his own ideas of perfection ; when they were such as would satisfy the audience, they satisfied the writer. It is seldom that authors, though more studious of fame than *Shakespeare*, rise much above the standard of their own age ; to add a little of what is best will always be sufficient for present praise, and those who find themselves exalted into fame, are willing to credit their encomiasts, and to spare the labour of contending with themselves.

97] It does not appear, that *Shakespeare* thought his works worthy of posterity, that he levied any ideal tribute upon future times, or had any further prospect, than of present popularity and present profit. When his plays had been acted; his hope was at an end ; he solicited no additon of honour from the reader. He therefore made no scruple to repeat the same jests in many dialogues, or to entangle different plots by the same knot of perplexity, which may be at least forgiven him, by those who recollect, that of *Congreve's* four comedies, two are concluded by a marriage in a mask, by a deception, which perhaps never happened, and which, whether likely or not, he did not invent.

98] So careless was this great poet of future fame, that, though he retired to ease and plenty, while he was yet little

declined into the vale of years, before he could be disgusted with fatigue, or disabled by infirmity, he made no collection of his works, nor desired to rescue those that had been already published from the depravations that obscured them, or secure to the rest a better destiny, by giving them to the world in their genuine state.

99] Of the plays which bear the name of *Shakespeare* in the late editions, the greater part were not published till about seven years after his death, and the few which appeared in his life are apparently thrust into the world without the care of the author, and therefore probably without his knowledge.

100] Of all the publishers, clandestine or professed their negligence and unskilfulness has by the late revisers been sufficiently shown. The faults of all are indeed numerous and gross, and have not only corrupted many passages perhaps beyond recovery, but have brought others into suspicion, which are only obscured by obsolete phraseology, or by the writer's unskilfulness and affectation. To alter is more easy than to explain, and temerity is a more common quality than diligence. Those who saw that they must employ conjecture to a certain degree, were willing to indulge it a little further. Had the author published his own works, we should have sat quietly down to disentangle his intricacies, and clear his obscurities ; but now we tear what we cannot loose, end eject what we happen not to understand.

101] The faults are more than could have happened without the concurrence of many causes. The style of *Shakespeare* was in itself ungrammatical, perplexed and obscure ; his works were transcribed for the players by those who may be supposed to have seldom understood them ; they were transmitted by copyers equally unskilful, who still multiplied errors; they were perhaps sometimes mutilated by the actors, for the sak oef

shortening the speeches ; and were at last printed without correction of the press.

102] In this state they remained, not as Dr. *Warburton* supposes, because they were unregarded, but because the editor's art was not yet applied to modern languages, and our ancestors were accustomed to so much negligence of *English* printers, that they could very patiently endure it. At last an edition was undertaken by *Rowe*, not because a poet was to be published by a poet, for *Rowe* seems to have thought very little on correction or explanation, but that our author's works might appear like those of his fraternity, with the appendages of a life and recommendatory preface. *Rowe* has been clamorously blamed for not performing what he did not undertake, and it is time that justice be done him, by confessing, that though he seems to have had no thought of corruption beyond the printer's errors, yet he has made many amendations, if they were not made before, which his successors have received without acknowledgement, and which, if they had produced them, would have filled pages and pages with censures of the stupidity by which the faults were committed, with displays of the absurdities which they involved, with ostentatious expositions of the new reading, and self congratulations on the happiness of discovering it.

103] Of *Rowe*, as of all the editors, I have preserved the preface, and have likewise retained the author's life, though not written with much elegance or spirit ; it relates however what is now to be known, and therefore deserves to pass through all succeeding publications.

104] The nation had been for many years content enough with Mr. *Rowe's* performance, when Mr. *Pope* made them acquainted with the true state of *Shakespeare's* text, shewed that it was extremely corrupt, and gave reason to hope that

there were means of reforming it. He collated the old copies, which none had thought to examine before, and restored many lines to their integrity ; but, by a very compendious criticism, he rejected whatever he disliked, and thought more of amputation than of cure.

105] I know not why he is commended by Dr. *Warburton* for distinguishing the genuine from the spurious plays. In this choice he exerted no judgement of his own ; the plays which he received, were given by *Hemings* and *Condel*, the first editors ; and those which he rejected, though, according to the licentiousness of the press in those times, they were printed during Shakespeare's life, with his name, had been omitted by his friends, and were never added to his works before the edition of 1664, from which they were copied by the later printers.

106] This was a work which *Pope* seems to have thought unworthy of his abilities, being not able to suppress his contempt of the *dull duty of an editor*. He understood but half his undertaking. The duty of a collator is indeed dull, yet, like other tedious tasks, is very necessary ; but an emendatory critic would ill discharge his duty, without qualities very different from dullness. In persuing a corrupted piece, he must have before him all possibilities of meaning, with all possibilities of expression. Such must be his comprehension of thought, and such his copiousness of language. Out of many readings possible, he must be able to select that which best suits with the state, opinions, and modes of language prevailing in every age, and with his author's particular cast of thought, and turn of expression. Such must be his knowledge, and such his taste. Conjectural criticism demands more than humanity possess, and he that exercises it with most praise has very frequent need of indulgence. Let us now be told no more of the dull duty of an editor.

107] Confidence is the common consequence of success. They whose excellence of any kind has been loudly celebrated, are ready to conclude, that their powers are universal. *Pope's* edition fell below his own expectations, and he was so much offended, when he was found to have left any thing for others to do, that he past the later part of his life in a state of hostility with verbal criticism.

108] I have retained all his notes, that no fragment of so great a writer may be lost; his preface, valuable alike for elegance of composition and justness of remark, and containing a general criticism on his author, so extensive that little can be added, and so exact, that little can be disputed, every editor has an interest to suppress, but that every reader would demand its insertion.

109] Pope was succeeded by *Theobald*, a man of narrow comprehension and small acquisitions, with no native and intrinsick splendour of genius, with little of the artificial light of learning, but zealous for minute accuracy, and not negligent in pursuing it. He collated the ancient copies, and rectified many errors. A man so anxiously scrupulous might have been expected to do more, but what little he did was commonly right.

110] In his report of copies and editions he is not to be trusted, without examination. He speaks sometimes indefinitely of copies, when he has only one. In his enumeration of editions, he mentions the two first folios as of high, and the third folio as of middle authority; but the truth is, that the first is equivalent to all others, and that the rest only deviate from it by the printer's negligence. Whoever has any of the folios has all, excepting those diversities which mere reiteration of editions will produce. I collated them all at the beginning, but afterwards used only the first.

111] Of his notes I have generally retained those which he retained himself in his second edition, except when they were confuted by subsequent annotators, or were too minute to merit preservation. I have sometimes adopted his restoration of a comma, without inserting the panegyrick in which he celebrated himself for his achievement. The exuberant excrescence of his diction I have often lopped, his triumphant exultations over *Pope and Rowe* I have sometimes suppressed, and his contemptible ostentation I have frequently concealed; but I have in some places shewn him, as he would have shewn himself, for the reader's diversion, that the inflated emptiness of some notes may justify or excuse the contraction of the rest.

112] *Theobald* thus weak and ignorant, thus mean and faithless, thus petulant and ostentatious, by the good luck of having *Pope* for his enemy, has escaped and escaped alone, with reputation, from this undertaking. So willingly does the world support those who solicite favour, against those who command reverence; and so easily is he praised, whom no man can envy.

113] Our author fell then into the hands of *Sir Thomas Hanmer*, the *Oxford* editor, a man, in my opinion, eminently qualified by nature for such studies. He had, what is the first requisite to emendatory criticism, that intuition by which the poet's intention is immediately discovered, and that dexterity of intellect which despatches its work by the easiest means. He had undoubtedly read much; his acquaintance with customs, opinions, and traditions, seems to have been large; and he is often learned without shew. He seldom passes what he does not understand, without an attempt to find or to make a meaning, and sometimes hastily makes what a little more attention would have found. He is solicitous to reduce to grammar, what he could not be sure that his author intended to be grammatical. *Shakespeare* regarded more the series of

ideas, than of words ; and his language, not being designed for the reader's desk, was all that he desired it to be, if it conveyed his meaning to the audience.

114] *Hanmer's* care of the metre has been too violently censured. He found the measures reformed in so many passages by the silent labours of some editors, with the silent acquiescence of the rest, that he thought himself allowed to extend a little further the license, which had already been carried so far without reprehension ; and of his corrections in general, it must be confessed, that they are often just, and made commonly with the least possible violation of the text.

115] But, by inserting his emendations, whether invented or borrowed, into the page, without any notice of varying copies, he has appropriated the labour of his predecessors, and made his own edition of little authority. His confidence indeed, both in himself and others, was too great ; he supposes all to be right that was done by *Pope* and *Theobald* ; he seems not to suspect a critic of fallibility, and it was but reasonable that he should claim what he so liberally granted.

116] As he never writes without careful enquiry and diligent consideration, I have received all his notes, and believe that every reader will wish for more.

117] Of the last editor it is more difficult to speak. Respect is due to high place, tenderness to living reputation, and veneration to genius and learning ; but he cannot be justly offended at that liberty of which he has himself so frequently given an example, nor very solicitous what is thought of notes, which he ought never to have considered as part of his serious employments, and which, I suppose, since the ardour of composition is remitted, he no longer numbers among his happy effusions.

118] The original and predominant error of his commentary, is acquiscence in his first thoughts; that precipitation which is produced by consciousness of quick discernment; and that confidence which presumes to do, by surveying the surface, what labour only can perform, by penetrating the bottom. His notes exhibit sometimes perverse interpretations, and sometimes improbable conjectures; he at one time gives the author more profundity of meaning, than the sentence admits, and at another discovers absurdities, where the sense is plain to every other reader. But his emendations are likewise often happy and just; and his interpretation of obscure passages learned and sagacious.

119] Of his notes, I have commonly rejected those, against which the general voice of the publick has exclaimed, or which their own incongruity immediately condemns, and which, I suppose, the author himself would desire to be forgotten. Of the rest, to part I have given the highest approbation, by inserting the offered reading in the text; part I have left to the judgment of the reader, as doubtful, though spacious; and part I have censured without reserve, but I am sure without bitterness of malice, and, I hope, without wantonness of insult.

120] It is no pleasure to me, in revising my volumes, to observe how much paper is wasted in confutation. Whoever considers the revolutions of learning, and the various questions of greater or less importance, upon which wit and reason have exercised their powers, must lament the unsuccessfulness of enquiry, and the slow advances of tsuth, when he reflects, that great part of the labour of every writer is only the destruction of those that went before him. The first care of the builder of a new system, is to demolish the fabricks which are standing. The chief desire of him that comments an author, is to show how much other commentators have corrupted and obscured

him. The opinions prevalent in one age, as truths above the reach of controversy, are confuted and rejected in another, and rise again to reception in remoter times. Thus the human mind is kept in motion without progress. Thus sometimes truth and error, and sometimes contrarieties of error, take each other's place by reciprocal invasion. The tide of seeming knowledge which is poured over one generation, retires and leaves another naked and barren ; the sudden meteors of intelligence which for a while appear of shoot their withdraw their lustre, and leave mortals again to grope their way.

121] These elevations and depressions of renown, and the contradictions to which all improvers of knowledge must for ever be exposed, since they are not escaped by the highest and brightest of mankind, may surely be endured with patience by criticks and annotators, who can rank themselves but as the statellites of their authors. How can'st thou beg for life, says *Achilles* to his captive, when thou knowest that thou art now to suffer only what must another day be suffered by *Achilles* ?

122] Dr. *Warburton* had a name sufficient to confer celebrity on those who could exalt themselves into antagonists, and his notes have raised a clamour too loud to be distinct. His chief assailants are the authors of the *Canons of criticism* and of the *Review of* Shakespeare's *text* ; of whom one ridicules his errors with air petulance, suitable enough to the levity of the controversy ; the other attacks them with gloomy malignity, as if he dragging to justice an assassin or incendiary. The one stings like a fly, sucks a little blood, takes a gay flutter, and returns for more ; the other bites like a viper, and would be glad to leave inflammations and gangrene behind him. When I think on one, with his confederates I remember the danger of *Coriolanus*, who was afraid that *girls with spits, and boys with stones, should slay him in puny battle* ; when the other crosses my imagination, I remember the prodigy in Macbeth,

An eagle tow'ring in his pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.

123] Let me however do them justice. One is a wit, and one a scholar. They have both shown acuteness sufficient in the discovery of faults, and have both advanced some probable interpretations of obscure passages; but when they aspire to conjecture and emendation, it appears how falsely we all estimate our own abilities, and the little which they have been able to perform might have taught them more candour to the endeavours of others.

124] Before Dr. *Warburton's* edition, *Critical observations on* Shakespeare had been published by Mr. *Upton*, a man skilled in languages, and acquainted with books, but who seems to have had no great vigour of genius or nicety of taste. Many of his explanations are curious and useful, but he likewise, though he professed to oppose the licentious confidence of editors, and adhere to the old copies, is unable to restrain the rage of emendation, though his ardour is ill seconded by his skill. Every cold empirick, when his heart is expanded by a successful experiment, swells into a theorist, and the laborious collator at some unlucky moment frolicks in conjecture.

125] *Critical, historical and explanatory notes* have been likewise published upon *Shakespeare* by Dr. *Grey*, whose diligent perusal of the old *English* writers has enabled him to make some useful observations. What he undertook he has well enough performed, but as he neither attempts judicial nor emendatory criticism, he employs rather his memory than his sagacity. It were to be wished that all would endeavour to imitate his modesty who have not been able to surpass his knowledge.

126] I can say with great sincerity of all my predecessors, what I hope will hereafter be said of me, that not one has left *Shakespeare* without improvement, nor is there one to whom I have not been indebted for assistance and information. What-

ever I have taken from them it was my intention to refer to its original author, and it is certain, that what I have not given to another, I believed when I wrote it to be my own. In some perhaps I have been anticipated ; but if I am ever found to encroach upon the remarks of any other commentator, I am willing that the honour, be it more or less, should be transferred to the first claimant, for his right, and his alone, stands above dispute ; the second can prove his pretensions only to himself nor can himself always distinguish invention, with sufficient certainty, from recollection.

127] They have all been treated by me with candour, which they have not been careful of observing to one another. It is not easy to discover from what cause the acrimony of a scholiast can naturally proceed. The subjects to be discussed by him are of very small importance ; they involve neither property nor liberty ; nor favour the interest of sect or party. The various readings of copies, and different interpretations of a passage, seem to be questions that might exercise the wit, without engaging the passions. But, whether it be, that *small things make mean men proud*, and vanity catches small occasions ; or that all contrariety of opinion, even in those that can defend it no longer, makes proud men angry ; there is often found in commentaries a spontoneous strain of invective and contempt more eager and venomous than is vented by the most furious controvertist in politics against those whom he is hired to defame.

128] Perhaps the lightness of the matter may conduce to the vehemence of the agency ; when the truth to be investigated is so near to inexistence, as to escape attention, its bulk is to be enlarged by rage and exclamation : That to which all would be indifferent in its original state, may attract notice when the fate of a name is appended to it. A commentator has indeed great temptations to supply by turbulence what he

wants of dignity, to beat his little gold to a spacious surface, to work that to foam with no art or diligence can exalt to spirit.

129] The notes which I have borrowed or written are either illustrative, by which difficulties are explained; or judicial, by which faults and beauties are remarked; or emendatory, by which deprevations are corrected.

130] The explanations transcribed from others, if I do not subjoin any other interpretation, I suppose commonly to be right, at least I intend by acquiescence to confess, that I have nothing better to progress.

131] After the labours of all the editors, I found many passages which appeared to me likely to obstruct the greater number of readers, and thought it my duty to facilitate their passage. It is impossible for an expositor not to write too little for some, and too much for others. He can only judge what is necessary by his own experience; and how long soever he may deliberate, will at last explain many lines which the learned will think impossible to be mistaken, and omit many for which the ignorant will want his help. These are censures merely relative, and must be quietly endured. I have endeavoured to be neither superfluously copious, nor scrupulously reserved, and hope that I have made my author's meaning accessible to many who before were frighted from perusing him, and contributed something to the public, by diffusing innocent and rational pleasure.

132] The complete explanation of an author not systematic and consequential, but desultory, and vagrant, abounding in casual allusions and light hints is not to be expected from any single scholiast. All personal reflections, when names are suppressed, must be in a few years irrecoverably obliterated; and customs, too minute to attract

the notice of law, such as modes of dress, formalities of conversation rules of visits, disposition of furniture, and practices of ceremony, which naturally find places in familiar dialogue, are so fugitive and unsubstantial, that they are not easily retained or recovered. What can be known, will be collected by chance, from the recesses of obscure and obsolete papers, perused commonly with some other view. Of this knowledge every man has some, and none has much ; but when an author has engaged the public attention, those who can add any thing to his illustration, communicate their discoveries, and time produces what had eluded diligence.

133] To time I have been obliged to resign many passages which, though I did not understand them, will perhaps hereafter be explained, having, I hope, illustrated some which others have neglected or mistaken, sometimes by short remarks, or marginal directions, such as every editor has added at his will, and often by comments more laborious than the matter will seem to deserve ; but that which is most difficult is not always most important, and to an editor nothing is a trifle by which his author is obscured.

134] The poetical beauties or defects I have not been very diligent to observe. Some plays have more, and some fewer judicial observations, not in proportion to their difference of merit, but because I gave this part of my design to chance and to caprice. The reader, I believe, is seldom pleased to find his opinion anticipated ; it is natural to delight more in what we find or make, than in what we receive. Judgement, like other faculties, is improved by practice, and its advancement is hindred by submission to dictatorial decisions, as the memory grows torpid by the use of a table book. Some initiation is however necessary ; or all skill, part is infused by precept, and part is obtained by habit ; I have therefore shewn

so much as may enable the candidate of criticism to discover the rest.

135] To the end of most plays, I have added short strictures, containing a general censure of faults, or praise of excellence ; in which I know not how much I have concurred with the current opinion ; but I have not, by any affection of singularity, deviated from it. Nothing is minutely and particularly examined, and therefore it is to be supposed, that in the plays which are condemned there is much to be praised, and i" these which, are praised to much to be condemned.

136] The part of criticism in which the whole succession of editors has laboured with the greatest diligence, which has occasioned the most arrogant ostentation, and excited the keenest acrimony, is the emendation of corrupted passages, to which the public attention having been first drawn by the violence of contention between *Pope* and *Theobald*, has been continued by the persecution, which, with a kind of conspiracy, has been since raised against all the publishers of *Shakespeare*.

137] That many passages have passed in a state of depravation through all the editions is indubitably certain ; of these the restoration is only to be attempted by collation of copies or sagacity of conjecture. The collator's province is safe and easy, the conjecture's perilous and difficult. Yet as the greater part of the plays are extant only in one copy, the peril must not be avoided nor the difficulty refused.

138] Of the readings which this emulation of amendment has hitherto produced, some from the labours of every publisher I have advanced into the text ; those are to be considered as in my opinion sufficiently supported ; some I have rejected without mention, as evidently erroneous ; some I have left in the notes without censure or approbation, as resting in equipoise between objection and defence ; and some, which seemed

specious but not right, I have inserted with a subsequent animadversion.

139] Having classed the observation of others, I was at last to try what I could substitute for their mistakes, and how I could supply their omissions. I collated such copies as I could procure, and whished for more, but have not found the collectors of these rarities very communicative. Of the editions which chance or kindness put into my hands I have given an enumeration, that I may not be blamed for neglecting what I had not the power to do.

140] By examining the old copies, I soon found that the later publishers, with all their boasts of diligence, suffered many passages to stand unauthorised, and contented themselves with *Rowe's* regulation of the text, even were they knew it to be arbitrary, and with a little consideration might have found it to be wrong. Some of these alterations are only the ejection of a word for one that appeared to him more elegant or more intelligible. These corruptions I have often silently rectified; for the history of our language, and the true force of our words, can only be preserved, by keeping the text of authors free from adulteration. Others, and those very frequent, smoothed the cadence, or regulated the measure; on these I have not exercised the same rigour; if only a word was transposed, or a particle inserted or omitted, I have sometimes suffered the line to stand; for the inconstancy of the copies is such, as that some liberties may be easily permitted. But this practice I have not suffered to proceed far, having restored the primitive diction wherever it could for any reason be preferred.

141] The emendations, which comparison of copies supplied I have inserted in the text; sometimes where the improvement was slight, without notice, and sometimes with an account of the reasons of the change.

142] Conjecture, though it be sometimes unavoidable, I have not wantonly nor licentiously indulged. It has been my settled principle, that the reading of the ancient books is probably true, and therefore is not to be disturbed for the sake of elegance, perspicuity, or mere improvement of the sense. For though much credit is not due to the fidelity, nor any to the judgment of the first publishers, yet they who had the copy before their eyes were more likely to read it right, than we who read it only by imagination. But it is evident that they have often made strange mistakes by ignorance or negligence, and that therefore, something may be properly attempted by criticism, keeping the middle way between presumption and timidity.

143] Such criticism I have attempted to practice, and where any passage appeared inextricably perplexed, have endeavoured to discover how it may be recalled to sense, with least violence. But my first labour is, always to turn the old text on every side, and try if there be any interstice, through which light can find its way ; nor would *Huetius* himself condemn me, as refusing the trouble of research, for the ambition of alteration. In this modest industry, I have not been unsuccessful. I have rescued many lines from the violations of temerity, and secured many scenes from the inroads of correction. I have adopted the Roman sentiment, that it is more honourable to save a citizen, than to kill an enemy, and have been more careful to protect than to attack.

144] I have preserved the common distribution of the plays into acts, though I believe it to be in almost all the plays void of authority. Some of those which are divided in the later editions have no division in the first folio, and some that are divided in the folio have no division in the preceding copies. The settled mode of the theatre requires four intervals in the play, but few, if any, of our author's compositions can

be properly distributed in that manner. An act is so much of the drama as passes without intervention of time or change of place. A pause makes a new act. In every real, and therefore in every imitative action, the intervals may be more or fewer, the restriction of five acts being accidental and arbitrary. This *Shakespeare* knew, and this he practicised ; his plays were written, and at first printed in one unbroken continuity, and ought now to be exhibited with short pauses, interposed as often as the scene is changed, or any considerable time is required to pass. This method would at once quell a thousand absurdities.

145] In restoring the author's works to their integrity, I have considered the punctuation as wholly in my power ; for what could be their care of colons and commas, who corrupted words and sentences. Whatever could be done by adjusting points is therefore silently performed, in some plays with much diligence, in others with less ; it is hard to keep a busy eye steadily fixed upon evanescent atoms, or a discursive mind upon evanescent truth.

146] The same liberty has been taken with a few particles or other words of slight effect. I have sometimes inserted or omitted them without notice. I have done that sometimes, which the other editors have done always, and which indeed the state of the text may sufficiently justify.

147] The greater part of readers, instead of blaming us for passing trifles, will wonder that on mere trifles so much labour is expended, with such importance of debate and such solemnity of diction. To these I answer with confidence, that they are judging of an art which they do not understand ; yet cannot much reproach them with ignorance, nor promise that they would become in general, by learning criticism, more useful happier or wiser.

148] As I practised conjecture more, I learned to trust it less; and after I had printed a few plays, resolved to insert none of my own readings in the text. Upon this caution I now congratulate myself, for every day increases my doubt of my emendations.

149] Since I have confined my imagination to the margin, it must not be considered as very reprehensible, if I have suffered it to play some freaks in its own dominion. There is no danger in conjecture; if it be proposed as conjecture; and while the text remains uninjured, those changes may be safely offered, which are not considered even by him that offers them as necessary or safe.

150] If my readings are of little value, they have not been ostentatiously displayed or importunately obtruded. I could have written longer notes, for the art of writing notes is not of difficult attainment. The work is performed, first by railing at the stupidity, negligence, ignorance, and asinine tastelessness of the former editors, and shewing, from all that goes before and all that follows, the inelegance and absurdity of the old reading; then by proposing something, which to superficial readers would seem specious, but which the editor rejects with indignation; then by producing the true reading, with a long paraphrase, and concluding with loud acclamations on the discovery, and a sober wish for the advancement and prosperity of genuine criticism.

151] All this may be done, and perhaps done sometimes without impropriety. But I have always suspected that the reading is right, which requires many words to prove it wrong; and the emendation wrong, that cannot without so much labour appear to be right. The justness of a happy restoration strikes at once, and the moral precept may be well applied to criticism, *quod dubitas ne feceris.*

152] To dread the shore which he sees spread with wrecks, is natural to the sailor. I had before my eye, so many critical adventures ended in miscarriage, that caution was forced upon me. I encountered in every page. Wit struggling with its own sophistry, and Learning confused by the multiplicity of its views. I was forced to censure those whom I admired, and could not but reflect, while I was dispossessing their emendations, how soon the same fate might happen to my own, and how many of the readings which I have corrected may be by some other editor defended and established.

Critics, I saw, that other's names efface,
And fix their own, with labour, in the place ;
Their own, like others, soon their place resign'd,
Or disappear'd, and left the first behind.

Pope.

153] That a conjectural critic should often be mistaken, cannot be wonderful, either to others or himself, if it be considered, that in his art there is no system, no principal and axiometical truth that regulates subordinate positions. His chance of error is renewed at every attempt ; an oblique view of the passage, a slight misapprehension of a phrase, a casual inattention to the parts connected, is sufficient to make him not only fail, but fail ridiculously ; and when he succeeds best, he produces perhaps but one reading of many probable, and he that suggests another will always be able to dispute his claims.

154] It is unhappy state, in which danger is hid under pleasure. The allurements of emendation are scarcely resistible. Conjecture has all the joy and all the pride of invention, and he that has once started a happy change is too much delighted to consider what objections may rise against it.

155] Yet conjectural criticism has been of great use in the learned world ; nor is it my intention to depreciate a study

that has exercised so many mighty minds, from the revival of learning to our own age, from the Bishop of *Aleria* to English *Bentley*. The critics on ancient authors have, in the exercise of their sagacity, many assistances, which the editor of *Shakespeare* is condemned to want. They are employed upon grammatical and settled languages, whose construction contributes so much to perspicuity, that Homer has fewer passages unintilligible than *Chaucer*. The words have not only a known regimen, but invariable quantities, which direct and confine the choice. There are commonly more manuscripts than one; and they do not often conspire in the same mistakes. Yet *Scaliger* could confess to *Salmasius* how little satisfaction his emendations gave him. *Illudunt nobis conjecture nostroe, quarum nos pudet, posteaquam in meliores codices incidimus*. And Lipsius could complain, that critics were making faults, by trying to remove them, *Ut olim vitiis, its nunc remediis laboratur*. And indeed, where mere conjecture is to be used, the emendations of *Scaliger* and *Lipsius*, notwithstanding their wonderful sagacity and erudition, are often vague and disputable, like mine or *Theobald's*.

156] Perhaps I may not be more censured for doing wrong, than for doing little; for raising in the public expectation of ignorance is indefinite, and that of knowledge is often tyrannical. It is hard to satisfy those who know not what to demand, or those who demand by design what they think impossible to be done. I have indeed disappointed no opinion more than my own; yet I have endeavoured to perform my task with no slight solicitude. Not a single passage in the whole work has appeared to me corrupt, which I have not attempted to restore; or obscure, which I have not endeavoured to illustrate. In many I have failed like others; and from many, after all my efforts, I have retreated, and confessed

the repulse. I have not passed over, with affected superiority what is equally difficult to the reader and to myself, but where I could not instruct him, have owned my ignorance. I might easily have accumulated a mass of seeming learning upon easy scenes; but it ought not to be imputed to negligence, that where nothing was necessary, nothing has been done, or that, where others have said enough, I have said no more.

157] Notes are often necessary, but they are necessary evils. Let him, that is yet unacquainted with the powers of *Shakespeare* and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play from the first scene to the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators. When his fancy is once on the wing, let it not stoop at correction or explanation. When his attention is strongly engaged, let it disdain alike to turn aside to the name of *Theobald* and of *Pope*. Let him read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption; let him preserve his oomprehension of the dialogue and his interest in the fable. And when the pleasures of novelty have ceased, let him attempt exactness, and read the commentators.

158] Particular passages are cleared by notes, but the general effect of the work is weakened. The mind is refrigerated by interruption; the thoughts are diverted from the principal subject; the reader is weary, he suspects not why; and at last throws away the book, which he has too diligently studied.

159] Parts are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed; there is a kind of intellectual remoteness necessary for the comprehension of any great work in its full design and its true proportions; a close approach shows the smaller niceties, but the beauty of the whole is discerned no longer.

160] It is not very grateful to consider how little the succession of editors has added to this author's power of pleasing. He was read, admired, studied, and imitated, while he was yet deformed with all the improprieties which ignorance and neglect could accumulate upon him; while the reading was not yet rectified, nor his allusions understand; yet then did *Dryden* pronounce 'that *Shakespeare* was the man, who, of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he draw them not laboriously, but luckily: When he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned: he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is every where alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many time flat and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him: No man can say, he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.'

161] It is to be lamented, that such a writer should want a commentary; that his language should become obsolete, or his sentiments obscure. But it is vain to carry wishes beyond the condition of human things; that which must happen to all, has happened to *Shakespeare*, by accident and time; and more than has been suffered by any other writer since the use of types, has been suffered by him through his own negligence of fame, or perhaps by that superiority of mind, which despised its own performances, when it compared them with its powers,

and judged those works unworthy to be preserved, which the critics of following ages were to contend for the fame of restoring and explaining.

162] Among these candidates of inferior fame, I am now stand the judgement of public ; and wish that I could confidently produce my commentary as equal to the encouragement which I have had the honour of receiving. Every work of this kind is by its nature deficient, and I should feel little solicitude about the sentence, were it to be pronounced only by the skilful and the learned.

SYNOPSIS

TO

JOHNSON : PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

SYNOPSIS OF THE PREFACE

(Numerical Order in Accordance with Paras)

Section 1

1. People foolishly imagine that they can become famous by talking ill of the common maxims like 'never speak ill of the dead' and 'old times are the best'.

2. We have respect for the past. We regard as best anything preserved from the past. In this we bless the past and cry down the present.

3. If it is a scientific work, we can show our power of judgment accurately and there can be no two opinions about it. It is different with literary works. Here the judgment will be a comparative one. A work that stands the test of time is a classic.

4. The collective judgment of ages determines the excellence of a literary work.

5. This test is applicable to Shakespeare. In spite of the changes in manners and customs, his genius is noticed and admired.

6. Popular judgment may be the product of passion or prejudice. Hence it is necessary to enquire into the nature of Shakespeare's peculiar genius.

7. A literary work has a claim to permanence if it offers a just and faithful representation of life in its universal or general aspects.

8. Shakespeare presented nature faithfully. His characters do not belong to any time or place. Their qualities are human qualities. The character in Shakespeare is a species, not an individual.

9. The works of Shakespeare are full of the common axioms of life. But his greatness lies in the progress of his plots and in the movement of his dialogues.

10. The characters of other dramatists are not the persons with whom we are acquainted in life. In Shakespeare even the language employed is true to life.

11. Love is not the only passion that has a bearing on life. Shakespeare's plots are woven round many emotions and passions.

12. Shakespeare did not always distinguish his characters. But it would be impossible to transfer the speech of one to another because there is a quality in the speech characteristic of the speaker.

13. His characters think and act like human beings. His supernatural too is never improbable. He makes even the unfamiliar situations and incidents natural and convincing.

14. Hence it may be stated that he represents a true picture of life, human sentiments in the familiar language of men. One can get to know the ways of this world from his dramas.

Section 2

15. Critics have been argued that verisimilitude to his setting is often spoilt by his scrupulous adherence to general human nature. Johnson refutes this point of view.

16. It is necessary to examine the problem of mixing the comic with the tragic because this kind of mingling has been prohibited by rules.

17. Shakespeare's plays cannot be classified into tragedies and comedies. They present that combination of joy and sorrow which we have in the world.

18. From the world the ancient dramatists chose joy alone or sorrow alone, and then wrote plays which became comedies and tragedies respectively. They did not combine the two.

19-20. Shakespeare mingled the two and this is opposed to the rules. But there is court higher than that of the critic. That is nature which sanctions the fusion. Moreover, Shakespeare fulfills the function of drama which is to instruct by pleasing.

21. It is faulty to argue that the alternation of the tragic and the comic interrupts the development of the passions. This error arises from confusing reality with fiction. The play is a

fiction and in fiction we can transfer our affections easily. Also we must reckon wit the varied tastes of the spectators.

22. The plays of Shakespeare were originally classified into comedies, tragedies, and histories.

23. The first editors called a play a comedy if it ended on a happy note.

24. Tragedy for them was a play that ended with a calamity. People did not rate tragedy high and the critics thought it irregular to introduce comic scenes.

25. A history play was taken to be a series of a ill-connected scenes. The Elizabethan could not distinguish a tragedy from a history play.

26. In all these Shakespeare introduced scenes of mirth amid more serious scenes.

27. The failure to understand Shakespeare's plan brought forth the criticism of Voltaire and Rymer.

28. Shakespeare wrote without models and without rules to guide him. Comedy was his forte. His tragedies were the products of great labour, and therefore he introduced the comic whenever he found it convenient to do so.

29. In spite of the changes in manners and language, his comic scenes have retained their value because the characters are represented as affected mainly by passions not by the adventitous peculiarities.

30. In the comedies he appeares "as one of the original masters of our language". Here the diction is above "grossness and below refinement". It is the language of "the common intercourse", and as such it can never become obsolete.

31. His dialogue is sometimes spoilt by ruggedness.

Section 3

32. In a spirit of candour and with impartiality Johnson would now speak of the faults in Shakespeare.

33. Shakespeare does not always observe poetic justice. He seems to write without any moral purpose when he is eager to please. The author must transcend his age if he is to be great.

34. The plots are constructed loosely and developed

carelessly. He does not expioit the opportunities to enforce morality.

35. The conclusions are not convincing. He seems to have been in a hurry to complete the play.

36. He is guilty of serious anchronisms. These improbable anachronisms were frequent in the Elizabethan times.

37. He indulges in gross wit and repartee. His ladies and gentlemen are indistinguishable from his clowns.

38. When he struggles in the composition of his tragedies, his style becomes stiff and tedious.

39. His dramatic narration is pompous and therefore tedious.

40. His art is easy and familiar. When he tries to write declamatory speeches, he is insipid.

41. At times he is caught by an unwieldy sentiment which he fails to express adequately. Then the reader is left to depend on his own wits to make out the meaning.

42. There is an absenee of correspondence between his language and the thoughts.

43. He is great when he appeals our pity and tenderness. But even here he indulges in witticisms and conceits forgetting his original purpose. Then he refuses to move the spectators or readers.

44. He forgets the purpose on hand and takes to puns and quibbles. The puns are always in opportune.

Section 4

45. Johnson begins the enquiry into the problem of the unities.

46. In the violation of the unities Johnson would defend Shakespeare.

47. We should not expect the unities in the history plays. One scene naturally the preceding, and the character are distinct and natural.

48. Shakespeare observes the unity of action and each play has the Aristotelian beginning, middle, and end. But there is no strict coherence of complication and resolution.

49. The unities of time and place are a burden to the poet and they do not please the spectators.

50. These two unities are insisted upon only to give an air of credibility.

51. The unity of place follows the unity of time. The play is said to become absolutely incredible if this unity were violated.

52. But the attack on Shakespeare from the standpoint of these unities is based on the absurdity of confusing a representation with reality.

53. If we can imagine the stage to be Alexandria in one scene, it is easy to imagine the same stage as Rowe in another. If we admit the idea of stage illusion, there is no limit to it.

54. The spectator is always in his senses. He always knows that the stage is only a stage and that the players are players. Then the stage in truthfully stand for different places successfully.

55. Lapse of time is represented only between the acts. In the first act drama imitates an action at one place and in the last at another. There should be a connection between the two. Time can be contracted in our imagination.

56. Here Johnson speaks about dramatic illusion.

57. This paragraph is on dramatic fiction.

58. When we read a Shakespearean play we are not bothered by considerations of time and place. The play affects in the same way whether we see it enacted or we read it by the fireside.

59. Shakespeare persisted in violating these unities even though he may have hit upon this violation by chance. If he does not care for the unities, he cannot be blamed. Such violations are but natural to a great genius like Shakespeare.

60. These rules are not essential today. Plays that obey these rules are likely to become literary curiosities.

61. If a dramatist can write a play according to rules and at the same time preserve the truth to nature, he must be commended.

62. Johnson feels that his enquiry is bound to lead to a

further consideration of the rules of drama. But he cannot stand that examination.

63. If Shakespeare were to be criticised for violating the rules, it should be remembered that he did not know them.

64. While judging an author we must understand the age in which he lived and tne opportunities he had in the cultivation of his art.

Section 5

65. Shakespeare lived at a time when learning was confined only to a few.

66. There was literary curiosity. The people wanted to learn and they were easily taken in by all kinds of tales.

67. The writers went after the strange and the fabulous because there was a taste for the marvellous and the improbable.

68. Shakespeare borrowed his plots from the popular novels.

69. His sources were accessible and familiar in his time. Even from manuscript sources be borrowed his plots for *As You Like It* and *Hamlet*.

70. His English history plays depend on the chronicles and ballads. He borrowed from the translations of the classics. The Roman history plays were based on North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*.

71. His plots are full of incidents which alone hold the attention of the audience, not the sentiment, not even the argument.

72. He holds the attention not merely by a presentation of the marvellous but through a representation of spectacular shows and brawls. The unlearned wanted them and they are true to life. The English drama demands accordingly that speech and action must go together.

73. Addison's *Cato* is the product of a poetical genius, and there is little truth to human nature. The Shakespearean play is the product of a natural genius and it is the "vigorous and vivacious offspring of observation impregnated by genius."

74. Shakespeare's works are like a forest while those of a "correct and regular" writer are like a garden. There is a rich mind in the first, while the second is like a cabinet.

Section 6

75-76. We have the indisputable authority of Ben Jonson to show that Shakespeare had little Latin and no Greek.

77. Some lines in Shakespeare appear to be conscious imitations of older writers. But these can be imitations from translations, or accidental coincidences, or involuntary reminiscences of ideas that have crept into daily speech.

78. Some of these instances are cited.

79. Such passages are very few and they may have come from accidental quotations or oral communications.

80. The *Comedy of Errors* is based on *Menaechmi* of Plautus. If other Latin plays were accessible to him, he would have exploited them.

81. We cannot be sure of the fact that he knew well the modern European languages.

82. He knew a little Latin. But he was not proficient enough to go through the Latin originals. He chose his plots from translations only.

83. Pope thought that there is enough evidence to show that Shakespeare had extraordinary knowledge. But he may have gleaned it in the libraries, or in the sports of the field, or among the manufacturers of the shop.

84. He was a diligent reader of books.

Section 7

85. We should not seek his excellence in his learning. We must seek it in what he achieved through his genius. He introduced character and dialogue and carried them to the heights.

86. We know very little of the chronological sequence of his plays. He may have gained his knowledge through long observation and study of human nature. After he had knowledge, nature assisted him. Hence his best works belong to his later life.

87. His characters comes from his careful and attentive study of mankind.

88. Nobody in Shakespeare's time attempted a psycholo-

gycal study of man. So one has to mix with people and find out the root causes through his own observation.

89. Shakespeare was not born into a nobility. He was brought up in poverty and he rose up through the force of his own genius.

90. He over came all the difficulties to present varieties of character. Here no one excelled him. From his works alone one can make a collection of prudential maxims.

91. He was also an exact observer of the inanimate world. He could sieze the exact features of a landscape.

92. He has no equal in the handling of language and in the presentation of character. He originated the English tragical harmony. His blank verse is diversified by dissyllable and trisyllable terminations.

93. These terminations also appear in the play *Hieronymo*. Shakespeare knew the art of making tragedy or comedy please the spectators.

94. Spenser and Shakespeare brought smoothness and harmony to English verse. His greatness is found in his tendency to soothe by the liquid grace of diction.

95. The verdict of the centuries is in favour of the greatness of Shakespeare.

Section 8

96. He wrote always to satisfy the audience.

97. He was not interested in publishing his plays. Hence he repeated himself.

98. He did not care to collect his works and publish them.

99. His works were published seven years after his death. Even then they had no sanction or authority from their author.

Section 9

100. The difficulties in understanding Shakespeare arise from the poor editing of his plays in the earlier quartos. The recent editors undertook the task of restoring the true text. But they made too many conjectures. There are conjectures even where the text is not faulty.

101-2. Johnson traces the stages through which errors in increasing numbers must have entered into the text of the plays.

103. Rowe's edition of Shakespeare's plays corrects many mistakes in the readings. These emendations are valuable. There was a commendatory preface to this edition.

104. Johnson retained Rowe's preface and other valuable material.

105. Pope undertook too much editorial work. He collated the old texts. But he rejected many good passages as unshakespearean.

106. Warburton commended Pope for distinguishing the genuine plays from the spurious. But this was actually achieved in the first Folio by Heminge and Condel.

107. Pope complained of the dull duties of an editor. There may be dullness in collating. But the process of restoring the true reading is very exciting ; and it demands a great comprehension and a command of language.

108, When Pope saw that edition was not upto the mark and that it was being supplemented by others, he went on quarrelling with others.

109. Johnson retained Pope's preface and notes.

110. The next editor was Theobald who was not very intelligent. But he had diligence and industry. He restored the correct reading in many places.

111. Theobald's remarks on the several editions is not reliable. He did not realise that the First Folio was the best.

112. Johnson retained Theobald's notes omitting his boastful remarks.

113. Theobald achieved fame by standing against Pope.

114. The next editor was Hanmer whose fine taste and knowledge enabled him to interpret the most obscure passages. But he introduced his sense of grammatical construction into the text.

115-6. Hanmer regularised Shakespeare's metre. Hanmer added little to emendatory criticism.

116. Johnson retained Hanmer's notes.

117. Johnson feels different to speak ill of Warburton's edition. Warburton was very well qualified to edit. But his misused his talents and indulged in wild conjectures.

118. His interpretations are rash and hasty, perverse and improbable.

119. Johnson explains the use he made of Warburton's notes.

120. Editors sadly waste their energy with quarrelling over the contibutions of their predecessors. This retards the progress towards truth.

121. The editor or comentator is only a satellite of the author he takes up.

122. A few authors rallied round Warburton. These were Thomas Edwards and Benjamin Heath.

123. They indulged in vituperation, but they were ignorant in emending and interpreting.

124. Upton's critical observations have a few good interpretations of the passages.

125. Gray's critical notes are valuable.

Section 10

126. Johnson expresses his indebtedness to the earlier editors. Each editor, he says, improved the text of Shakespeare. Some of his own opinions may have actually come from other sources.

127. He will not refer to his predecessors with any note of bitterness.

128. The controversies of the editors and commentators are of a trifling nature ; but they get excited.

129. He has added notes which are illustrative, judicial, and emendatory.

130. He has generally explained a passage by quoting the remarks of the earlier editors and interpreters.

131. He tried to give neither too much nor too little by way of explanation. He sought only to make that intelligible which had been obscure to him.

132. A complete exposition of an author like Shakespeare is impossible. Shakespeare wrote in a desultory way. He has many casual allusions to local customs and these are lost to us. They have to be discovered in course of time. Hence a thorough explanation may be possible to future generations.

133. Johnson has left to the future what he left undone.

134. He has not been thorough in his evaluation. He stated the beauties and defects of a few plays so that the reader may extend this method to the other plays.

135. His judgment is too general and the reader must, therefore, fill it up with details.

136. The emendatory part has generally given rise to acrimonious debates and persecutions.

137. Emendation of the corrupt passages depends on the collation of different texts or on conjecture. Since many plays exist only in a single copy, one has to face the perils of conjecture.

138. Johnson made a judicious use of the emendations made by his predecessors.

139. He sought to rectify the mistakes by collating as many old copies as he could get.

140. Many unauthorised emendations have got into the text. Johnson corrected most of them. He tried to spare only the changes made from a consideration of metre.

141. The emendations based on the collation of the texts have been inserted in the text, and the reasons are given in some instances.

142. He abstained from indulging in too many conjectural readings. The first folio is reliable. Conjecture comes into play where ignoranc or negligence of the scribes and printers introduced errors.

143. He always tried to retain the original text. If the text is still obscure, he made only those changes which caused no violence to the passage.

144. He adopted the common division of the play into five acts, though he does not find any reason for this arbitrary division.

145. The original publishers were not careful about punctuation. So he had to correct the punctuation.

146. He took the same liberty in inserting particles or words of slight importance.

147. He answers the charge that much of Shakespearean criticism is only trifling.

148. He has been cautious in using conjectural criticism.

149. The conjectural emendations are placed only in the margin.

150. His readings are not forced on the reader in a showy way. They are not elucidated in an elaborate manner.

151. We have to suspect any reading or emendation that needs an elaborate defence.

152. His successors may put aside his reputation as a Shakespearean editor.

153. Conjectural criticism is based on no principles and hence it is liable to be faulty.

154. One should be careful about conjectural emendations.

155. Still conjectural criticism has its own value. Its value was recognised even during the Renaissance.

156. Johnson may not have come up to the expectation in this edition. But what he did was done conscientiously. He has confessed his ignorance or failure where he felt it.

157. The proper way to read Shakespeare is to read through the bare text, and then the commentators.

158. If one reads the notes first, his pleasure will be spoilt.

159. A correct judgment must be formed on the work as a whole.

160. A better appreciation of Shakespeare preceded a critical examination of his work.

161. Shakespeare does not need a commentary.

162. Johnson wishes to be judged by the learned.

NOTES

TO

JOHNSON : PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE

NOTES

(Numerical Order in Accordance with Paras)

1. **without reason**—in a mood of charity.

due only to excellence—because there is something great in them.

consolatory expedients—opportunistic or timely ideas which will console.

What the ......refuses—The present age refuses eminence for themselves.

denied by envy—They think foolishly that they do not get respect because of the petty jealousies of mankind.

by time—because time removes from man's memory the ills of the dead.

2. **antiquity**—the quality of being old.

votaries—worshippers, admirers.

prejudice—partiality, blind faith.

time .....chance—Time cooperates by making us forget its drawbacks and praise only its virtues.

the shades of age—the mist that successfuly screens the object ; the mist of centuries.

artificial opacity—coloured glasses.

the great contention—Johnson is referring to the famous quarrel of Temple and Bentley and its fine satire in Swift's *Battle of the Books*.

3. **To works**—the literary works.

principles demonstrative—principles which are established on the basis of evidence.

length......esteem—how long it has remained fresh and fascinating, and how people regarded it so long.

genius—literary genius.

demonstration—something that can be proved.

flux of years—passage of time.

Pythagorean scale—Pythagoras of the sixth century B. C. discovered that the musical intervals depend on certain mathematical ratios of lengths of string at the same tension.

Homer—his works are *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

know not ..... intelligence—do not know how to call it perfect.

4. **arises therefore**—Johnson refers to the two common maxims mentioned in the first paragraph.

gloomy persuasion—pessimist's faith.

indubitable positions—establish and true principles.

5. **prescriptive**—prescribed by custom.

outlived his century—Shakespeare died in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. He was read even when the theatres were closed. The Restoration brought him back to the stage, and his popularity continues.

personal allusions—Topical allusions.

local customs—like the hanging of an arras before a wall.

temporary opinions—opinions of a political or religious character depending on the party in power.

the modes of artificial life—manners of the polite or genteel society.

obscure the scenes—serves to conceal his thought.

perished—lost to us.

opinion—political view.

faction—political party.

invectives—weapons of abuse. Political pamphleteering was popular from 1660 onwards Addison and Steele in prose, and Dryden and Pope in verse indulged in it. Johnson too wrote on the Falkland Islands.

passion—hatred.

devolved—were handed down.

6. **infallible**—thoroughly flawless.

7. **just representations**--The classical view was that art imitates nature. Nature for Johnson is no other than "the general fundamental truths of experience." It is not life, because life meant the "actual and particular occurrences or persons." To represent nature means "the portrayal of that which is conformable to the general fundamental truths of experience, as distinguished from the representation of life." General nature therefore stands for general or universal truths.

Particular manners—The habits and customs of particular persons and societies.

nearly—accurately.

irregular .... invention—Combinations of objects having different characteristics. These objects are the products of wild fancies. Thus the fusion of the natural and the supernatural, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is an example.

that novelty........truth—We are full of the ordinary happenings in life. We are therefore in search of something new. The pleasure of the fantastic object, which in new, is shortlived because we want that which is true to the common and universal experiences of life. Johnson excludes from his conception literature those works that deal with particular persons and societies, and those in which fancy runs wild.

8. **manners ....life**—external habits and inward life consisting of feelings, emotions, passions, wills, and thoughts.

His characters ......—His characters are neither Englishmen, nor Italians, nor those of any other land. They are not localised. They belong to no country. Yet an intelligent reader can see in them some traits of the Elizabethan personalities. His Portia reminds us of Queen Elizabeth.

modified—governed.

peculiarities—professional habits of appearance.

accidents—those that appear for a short time.

The whole .. ..motion—These passions and principles which shape and mould the conduct of man in life.

individual—one who has peculiar or specific habits, thoughts and attitudes.

species—man in general.

9. **wide extension of design**—wide plan which includes humanity.

practical axioms—principles which are of value in actual life.

Euripides—The third great Greek Tragedian (480-405 B. C.) is full of moral precepts.

a system of .... prudence—principles which are of value in society and at home. Prudence is worldly wisdom. Johnson refers to the wise sayings of the conduct of life.

fable—"the series of contexture of events which constitute a poem epic or dramatic," says Johnson.

Hierocles—Boswell speaks of Johnson giving "A free translation of the Jests of Hierocles." These appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1741. The 'select quotations' refers to William Dodd's *Beauties of Shakespeare* (1752). Hierocles is a fifth century neoplatonist, author of *Asteia*, a collection of jests.

10. **It will ...... imagined**—It cannot strike our imagination easily.

ancient school—The schools of rhetoric popular at Athens and Rome. The schools of the Sophists.

disqualified—in the schools are learnt only the theory of life, not the practical life. Hence they were not able to play their part in life well.

stage—theatre.

When it .... direction—when the plays of others were staged.

commerce—activity, social behaviour.

determined by the incident—fitting to the occasion. The dialogue results from the nature of the persons and the situation.

fiction—belonging to the imagined world.

11. **every other stage**—the stage other than that of Shakespeare.

To bring a lover .....—In the modern drama love alone is dominant. In Shakespeare love is one of the many motives influencing the thoughts, speeches and actions of the characters.

Nearly 22 plays of Shakespeare do not treat love, or they treat of it in a remote way only. The English Historical plays have nothing to do with love. In the present sentence we have a reference to *Romeo and Juliet*.

for this—to achieve it.

probability—credibility.

sum of life—life as a whole.

regular—moderate, equable.

exorbitant—exaggerated.

12. **ample and general**—taken from humanity as such and possessing the qualities common to mankind.

with Pope—Pope's statement is to be found in his Preface to *The Works of Shakespeare* (1725). Pope says : "To this life and variety of character, we must add the wonderful preservation of it ; which is such throughout his plays, that had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker." Pope thus has an opposite point of view.

characteristical—peculiar or specific to the character of the speaker.

equally adapted—attributed with justice to every one.

The choice.... choice—A speech can be transferred from one to another only if there is sufficient reason for doing so.

13. **aggravated**—having great passion.

barbarous romances—the reference is to the works of authors like Ariosto and Tarso where we have dragons, dwarfs, giants, ghosts and spirits.

invigorated—gave the reader life or animation.

giant—the giant is an example of "unexampled excellence" and the dwarf is a symbol of depravity.

his expectations—his belief that similar things would happen in real life.

heroes—a hero for Johnson is one who has some remarkable quality to the total exclusion of any other. Shakespeare's heroes do not have the features which distinguish them from common humanity. They are ordinary persons.

level with life—realistic, true to experience.

disguise—treat perversely. The ordinary courage is presented as the awe-inspiring heroism.

approximates—makes it as near to us as possible.

if .....possible—if it could really happen in actual life.

14. **mazed**—confused.

phantoms—characters not drawn from life.

by scenes......passions—The scenes appear to be so authentic that even a hermit after going them can understand the affairs of the world, and a priest, who never felt such passions, can foresee the development of a passion.

confessor—priest.

15. **narrower principles**—principles derived from books not from life.

Dennis—John Dennis (1657-1734), a dramatist and critic who attacked Addison and Pope. Pope spoke of his "damnation to everlasting fame". The reference here is to his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare* (1712). Dennis remarks that for want of learning, Shakespeare "made gross mistakes in the characters which he had drawn from history, against the equality and conveniency of manners of his dramatical persons .. ..He might as well have imagined a grave majestic Jack Padding as a buffoon in a Roman senator."

Rhymer—Thomas Rymer (1641-1713), in his *A Short View of Tragedy*, attacked *Othello* in 1692.

Romans—his Roman characters are Romans only because they have Roman names.

Voltaire—Voltaire (1694-1778), the french writer objected in *Hamlet*, Claudius and Gertrude drinking on the stage in his *Dissertation sur la Tragedie*. In *Lettres Philosophiques* he condemns the grossness of the grave-diggers.

Menenius—In Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* he appears as a senator and patrician. But he becomes the target of laughter.

Danish usurper—Claudius. The reference is to the last scene of *Hamlet*.

accident—It is by a chance that a Coriolanus was born in Rome as a patrician. Nature created him as a human being.

Shakespeare usually considers his characters as nature created them, and it is for a moment that he pays attention to their place of birth and to their station in life.

the essential character—the character of a human being, of what he is in himself.

distinctions .....adventitious—the distinctive features acquired are not an essential part of his character, because they can be rejected at will.

His story .....men—The story demands the introduction of Romans or Kings. But he pays no attention to the qualities they may have acquired as Romans or as kings. He treats them essentially as human beings.

all dispositions—diverse characters. Rome is like any other city and it has men of diverse tempers. Buffoons cannot be absent there. These could be found in abundance in the senates and council-halls. So Menenius was made a buffoon.

despicable—contemptible.

its natural power—intoxication and forgetfulness.

These are .....cavils—the attacks of Dennis, Rymer and Voltaire.

drapery—canvass, setting.

16. **Censure**—the criticism refers to the Tragi-Comedies or romances and to the tragedies having comic scenes.

17. **sublunary nature**—state of the world.

mingled.....proportion—combined in all possible ways.

without design—in a confused way.

18. **Casualities**—accidents.

some the crimes—Like Sophocles and Euripides in Greek and Seneca in Latin.

some the absurdities—like Aristophanes and Menander in Greek and Plautus and Terence in Latin.

the two modes—comic and tragic.

attempted both—combined the two.

19. **not only in........composition**—not only in the mind of the reader but also in the same composition.

successive..... design—course of the development of the plot.

20. an appeal......nature—the schools of criticism are not the final arbiters of judges. There is a court higher than these, namely, nature or experience. Johnson did not blindly follow the neo classical ideal, because he believed in reason foremost. As it is said : "Literature must be tested by a direct appeal to experience, by its truth to human nature, by its effect upon man's mental, emotional and sensory faculties. And to aid us in determining and applying such tests reason is called to the aid of experience". The appeal is to general human nature.

The end of pleasing—This is from Horace's *Ars Poetica*, "A poet should instruct, or please, or both". In his Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* Dryden said : "To instruct delightfully is the general end of poetry. Philosophy instructs, but it performs its work by precept ; which is not delightful, or not so delightful as example". Still earlier Sidney made this point in English criticism.

mingled drama—drama that combines the tragic with the comic.

alternations of exhibition—showing the tragic and in the next scene presenting the comic.

nearer than either—Life is a mingled yarn of good and evil, a tangled skein of pleasure and pain. In life joy and sorrow do alternate. We do not have a pure tragedy or a pure comedy in actual life. The mixed drama of Shakespeare is therefore closer to life than the pure tragedy or pure comedy.

great machinations—great tragic conflicts.

slender designs—lesser comic intrigues.

concatenation—cooperation.

21. the passions........progression—the development of the passions in the representation is said to be interrupted. A character is angry at the end of one scene, and the next scene is comic. Then the effect of the passion is destroyed.

wants—is deficient in.

specious—plausible.

fiction—That which is not a fact of life; the fancied invention of a poet. If we are interested in a fiction, our attention can be more easily diverted to something else. This is not possible if we are interested in an actual occurrence.

transferred—diverted from the tragic to the comic.

pleasing melancholy—a successful presentation of melancholy which gives us aesthetic satisfaction.

disterbance—vexatious feeling.

relief—feeling of joy.

habitudes—habits, natures.

22. **Their edition**—The reference is to the *First Folio* of 1623, edited by Heminge and Condell. Heming played the role of Falstaff and he also acted in Ben Jonson's plays. He was the chief proprietor of the Globe Theatre. Condell was actor and partner of the Globe and Blackfriar theatres.

distinguished—discriminated.

23. **however .... incidents**—the intermediate incidents are not considered. They paid attention only to the nature of the ending. Here 'through' is to be read as 'though'.

catastrophe—that stage of the plot wherein the dramatic conflict is brought to an issue. Suckling's *Aglaura* and Howard's *Vestal Virgin* have two kinds of fifth acts. By 1662 *Romeo and Juliet* was transformed into a tragi-comedy by James Howard. Fate made a comedy of *King Lear*.

24. **in those times**—in the age of Shakespeare.

dignity—it refers to style.

elevation—refers to the characters and sentiments.

lighter pleasure—pleasure coming from low characters or comic scenes.

25. **nicely**—scrupulously.

tragedy ..... history—In the first folio *Richard II* appears as history, while *Antony and Cleopatra* is treated as a tragedy. The former has a greater unity of action than the latter. Yet the important thing about these history plays is the characterisation.

continued ..... **plays**—Such are the plays *King Henry VI*, and *King Henry IV*. The last is completed in *Henry V*.

26. **without** ...... **emotion**—in an even temper, without exciting the feelings.

tranquillity—an equable state.

27. **Rymer and Voltaire**—Johnson is actually criticising Voltaire.

impropriety—The impropriety may refer to the opening of the play where we find two sentinels. The critic wants the hero to appear in the opening scene. There is mystery surrounding the opening scene.

Iago ..... **play**—The opening scene of Othello.

28. **the world** .. .. **him**—Shakespeare was an untutored genius. When he came to London the world lay fully open before him. There was none to guide him.

natural disposition—genius. The second 'disposition' may be the bent of mind.

What no ..... **improve**—He achieves perfection in comedy. Hence we cannot better his comedies.

skill—result of the labour and art.

instinct—result of his instinctive nature. The comic muse was more natural to him.

29. **in manners or in words**—in the social customs, habits and fashions, and in the modes of speech. These vary from generation to generation.

particular forms—particular fashions and habits.

communicable to—appealing to the hearts and convincing to the minds.

natural—inborn.

adventitious—accidental.

dyes—colours.

pervade the whole mars—characterise the entire species.

accidental .....modes—The same man can adopt different customs and habits only as long as they are fashionable. These are not permanent to mankind.

admits......decay—They cannot be improved or destroyed.

Sand—refers to the plays that present the changing fashions.

flood—flux of time and fashion.

rock—Shakespearean play.

fabrics—compositions.

30. Consistent and congenial to—Consistent with and close to.

analogy—The correspondence of a word or phrase with the genius of a language ; a similarity of derivative or inflectional processes. Johnson is referring to a mode of phraseology which strictly follows the laws of etymology of that language, to a pure English idiom.

The common .....life—The common level of conversation in actual life.

ambition of elegance—language of society.

polite—genteel society.

modish innovations—strange turns of speech. These are imitations or borrowings from other languages.

in hope .....better—with the hope singling themselves out of the common mars of mankind.

vulgar—common modes of speech.

a conversation above .....—This is Johnson's definition of the perennially fresh style.

equally remote—living in the same distant times like Kyd, Greene and Marlowe.

excellencies—excellences.

31. unexceptionably constant—true on all occasions.

familiar dialogue—The dialogue of comedy which is a transcript from popular manners and real life.

forced—difficult to understand.

32. **innocently**—with no malice.

little regard—no attention.

candour—kindliness.

33. **imputed ... men**—attributed to the lack of a purpose.

Virtue to convenience—for the sake of advantage he may gain in the plot construction. The wicked Bertram is rewarded with the love of Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well.* Johnson observed on the play : "Decency required that Bertram's double crime of cruelty and disobedience joined likewise with some hypocrisy, should raise more resentment ; and that though his mother might easily forgive him, his king should more pertinaciously vindicate his own authority and Helen's merit ; of all this Shakespeare could not be ignorant, but Shakespeare wanted to conclude the play."

a system of social duty—a code of social morality.

he that thinks ..... morally—Johnson's critical position has its firm foundations in the two inseparable principles of reason and morality. Shakespeare's plays agree with nature ; and nature, says Johnson, is reason.

casually—without any definite moral end ; by chance.

indifferently—not paying attention to the fact that a good man will not place himself in the evil circumstances, or that the good man will not allow himself to be influenced by the evil around him.

barbarity—crudeness.

34. **slight consideration**—a little more attention.

design—The full extent of his plot. His plays are not designed well. The characters seem to direct the plot. Thus in *The Merchant of Venice*, the bond story and the episode of the rings grow out of the characters.

exhibitions—scenes.

35. **The latter part** .. ..—Johnson refers to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *As You Like It*. The repentance of the villance is not convincing.

in view of his reward—within sight of the representation on the stage.

36. **gives to one age** .....—Johnson is not echoing Dennis who said that Shakespeare's Romans have nothing Roman about them. He is referring to the anachronisms. An anachronism is a characteristic of the present age applied to an earlier age.

Pope has endeavoured—Pope agreed that there "may have been the many blunders and illiteracies of the first publishers of his works.........It not being at all credible that there could be the errors of any man who had the least tincture of a school, or the last conversation with such as hand."

Hector quoting........—This is a reference to *Troilus and Cressida*, 2.2.166. Aristotle lived long after Hector.

Theseus........—The reference is to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Theseus and Hippolyta come from the Greek world. The fairies belong to the medieval Germanic myths. Johnson uses "Gothic' to mean medieval.

Sidney—Sir Philip Sidney (1554—1586) was author of the pastoral romance *Arcadia*. The pastoral age was that of Theocritus who lived in the second century B. C. The feudal age comes from the eleventh century. The names in *Arcadia* are pastoral, the setting is idyllic, and the actions belong to the age of chivalry. The pastoral ages are the days of innocence. The ages of turbulence are the chivalrous times.

37. **reciprocations of smartness**—repartees.

Contests of sarcasm—witticisms.

pleasantry—wit.

delicacy—modesty.

sufficiently.........**manners**—The gentlemen are not distinguished from the clowns in their gibes and tests.

relaxations......**elegant**—At court they showed stateliness, formality, and reserve. When they relaxed they became coarse and unrefined.

38. **exigence**—need of the situation.

solicits his invention—when uninspired, he struggles to find the proper word or phrase.

tumour—turgidity. The word comes from Longinus who calls it an "empty inflation void of sincerity" ; and it produces the effect opposite of what is intended. Johnson singled out a speech in *Antony and Cleopatra* as a case of tumour or tumidity.

39. **narration**—narrative part like the account of Belarius about the two boys in *Cymbeline*.

Circumlocution—round-aboutness.

40. **declamations**—rhetorical flourishes like the lecturer of Egeus to Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or of Lear to Cordelia in I. 1, or of Polonius to Laertes.

his power ..... nature—no one is declamatory in life. In life we have easy or familiar talk.

amplification—enlarging, adding details to details.

41. **is incident to him**—is likely to come to him.

unwieldy sentiment—an idea or feeling which cannot be adequately expressed in words.

comprises—comprehends.

42. **bulky**—long and unwieldy.

trivial sentiments .....–A passage full of sonorous epithets and swelling figures of speech is likely to contain a trivial idea or a common-place. We are then disappointed.

43. **to sink ..... dejection**—to express them in a melancholy way.

mollify them—soften their hearts.

by the fall of greatness—by presenting the fall of a great person.

the danger of innocence—the sufferings of an innocent person like Ophelia, Cordelia, or Imogen.

the crosses of love—when love is thwarted by a parent as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or as in the case of Ophelia.

without .....conceits—without inserting in such scenes some vain conceit or other. The conceit is a farfetched comparsion or word-play.

contemptible equivocation—words having a double meaning.

to move—to affect us.

counteracts himself—defeats his own end.

44. **quibble**—play on words, pun. This includes, equivocation, ambiguity, verbal argument and the like.

luminous vapours—will-o'-the wisp : The traveller loses his way and welcomes the deceiving fires in the night. He is deceived as they lead him to a quagmire. Shakespeare too seizes on some bright quibble, pursues it, and becomes obscure.

at all adventures—at any cost.

malignant—evil spirit.

the golden apple—The reference is to the golden apples thrown at Atalanta by Milanion to win the race against her. Their beauty fascinated her and she was left behind. Milanion was therefore able to win the race. Finally he married her. As Atalanta's attention was diverted by the beauty of the golden apples, so too was Shakespeare's by the quibble. He loses sight of his original purpose.

fatal Cleopatra—Antony was bewitched by Cleopatra's beauty and lost the Roman empire and also his life.

45. **Unities**—the dramatic unities of action, time, and place.

joint authority—critics claimed to derive these rules from the practice of the poets.

46. **rated**—estimated.

irregularity—irregular observance of the unities.

adventure—attempt.

47. **His histories**..........—Johnson here follows the rules which declare that a play can be only a tragedy or a comedy The history plays are neither and they are therefore not subject to the rules. Johnson is using the threefold classification employed by the editors of the first folio.

various and affecting—varied or diverse and appealing to us emotionally.

intended—aimed at.

48. **intrigue**—complication.

design—plan.

discover—reveal finally.

poet of nature—poet who follows or imitates the course of events as they occur in real life.

concatenated—joined together.

spared—omitted.

general system—plot as a whole.

the end of expectation—as we have anticipated it.

49. **nearer view** – closer examination.

Corneille—Corneille published his dramatic discourses. The second discourse (1660) deals with the three unities. He observed them from the time of his *Cid* (1638). Still he pleaded against a rigid observance of the unity of time.

discovering—revealing.

50. **The necessity........ credible**—If the dramatic action were to be convincing, it should correspond to the actual time which a similar action in actual life would have taken. The unity of time was therefore needed to make the drama appear as an actual section of life. In *Rambler* 156, he observed : "With no greater right to our obedience have the critics confined the dramatic action to a certain number of hours. Probability requires that the time of action should approach somewhat nearly to that of exhibition, and those plays will always be thought most happily conducted which crowd the greatest variety into the least space"

distant kings—the reference is to *Antony and Cleopatra* where the persons move between Rome and Alexandria.

whom they saw—whom the spectators saw.

51. **From the narrow........place**—If the actual time of the action in limited to a day, it follows that the action cannot

be spread over an area that needs more than a day for traversing. Many changes of place cannot be allowed. The illustration mentioned in the next sentence refers to *Antony and Cleopatra.*

dragons of Medea—Medea, wife of Jason, murdered his second wife and fled in a chariot drawn by winged serpents. She fled in that Chariot from Corinth to Athens.

a house ... plain—the reference is to *Macbeth* where the stage which was Macbeth's castle became a plain where he meets the witches.

Thebes—a Greek name of a city in Upper Egypt.

Persepolis—a city of Persia.

52. **misery**—drawbacks.

without resistance or reply—So far no one attempted a critical rejection of the unities and Johnson is the first to-day. Dryden speaks against the unities, but he praises them too. Dryden praised the Elizabethan drama for its regularity and irregularity alike.

authority—Johnson's authority is Shakespeare. The authority of the neoclassicist is the ancient Greek and Latin drama.

position—critical point of view.

while his .... false—Even when he is defining his critical point of view about the unity of time, his common-sense tells him that this position is false. His argument is based on the idea that the drama is an actual transcript from life, and this is faulty.

in its materiality—in the state in which it is presented.

53. **palace of Ptolemies**—the Ptolemies are the ancient kings of Egypt.

Actium—a town at the entrance of the Ambracian Gulf in Greece. Here Octavius defeated Antony and Cleopatra in 31 B. C.

certain limitation—definite limits.

Pharsalia—North of Greece where Caesar defeated Pompey.

Granicus—a river in Asia Minor where Alexander had his first victory against Persia in 334 B. C.

in a state of elevation—on the heights of imagination.

empyrean poetry—lofty poetry.

circumscriptions—limitations.

count the clock—see to note whether the unity of time was obeyed.

calenture—fever ; delirium.

54. **the spectators........senses**—The spectators are not in the world of imagination only. In the theatre they are conscious and they are not prepared to be deceived.

55. **elapses.........acts**—the movement of time is generally found between the end of one act and the beginning of the next.

of so much......same—The time taken by one scene on the stage is equal to the actual time of the action presented. Within the scene one cannot present the lapse of time.

Mithridates—King of Pontus from 123 to 63 B. C., was a great enemy of the Romans. He was defeated in 63 B. C. by Pompey, near the Euphrates. Pontus is the country on the south-eastern shores of the Black Sea.

Luccullus—Lucius Lucullus (110-57 B. C.) was a Roman General, celebrated as the conqueror of Mithridates.

obsequious to the imagination—dutiful or obedient to the imagination.

contract the time—regard a longer time as shorter.

their imitation—their imitation in drama.

56. **moves**—can appeal to our emotions.

credited—credible.

himself feel—feel without losing his identity.

feigned—imitated.

fallacy—delusion.

fancy the players—imagine ourselves to be the players.

fancy......unhappy—the delusion is that for a short time we imagine ourselves unhappy:

our consciousness of fiction—our awareness of the fact that what we see is not real.

57. **recreated**—refreshed.

takes...Agincourt—If we are excited, it is not the product of our seeing the field of Agincourt. Henry V had his decisive victory over the French at Agincourt.

concomitants—accompaniments like the gestures and the modulations of the voice.

Familiar comedy—comedy which deals with familiar themes.

Petruchio—the hero of *The Taming of the Shrew.*

grimace—mimicry through gestures.

Cato—a tragedy by Addison. The reference is to the first scene of the fifth act. There Cato is soliloquising, with a Platonic Dialogue in his hand and a drawn sword nearby, on the immortality of the soul.

58. **evident**—clear.

may pass...hers—The hour is the duration of his reading the life.

59. **knew the unities**—In *Henry V* the chorus at the beginning of every act apologises for violating the unities of time and place. In *The Winter's Tale* we have *Time* explaining at the beginning of the fourth act about the growth of Perdita. The *Tempest* covers a duration of five hours and the action takes place in the island only.

by design—deliberately.

did not want—did not lack.

false assumptions—It is an error of assume that a play is an actual transcript from life.

circumscribing—limiting the time of action.

at Venice—The reference is to *Othello.*

positive—artificial.

suitable to—become a fitting reply to.

non usque .....tolli—"The course of time has not wrought such confusion that the Laws would not rather be trampled on by Caesar than saved by Metellus". The passage is from Lucan's *The Civil War* (3.138).

60. wit—genius.

by mere authority—by a simple appeal to the authority of the critic.

so easily received—accepted by literary men.

curiosity—some literary relic.

ostentatious art—showy display of the rules.

possible .....necessary—what can actually take place, not what is absolutely necessary for the action of the play.

61. all the order—all the varieties like the Ionian, Corinthian, and Gothic.

62. deliberately—after due thought.

temerity—boldness, rashness.

contrary opinion—that the rules are absolute and unalterably binding.

as Aeneas withdrew ......—Juno and Neptune were on the Greek side. They interfered when there was a fight between Aeneas and Achilles. They spread a cloud over Achilles and drove Aeneas to the rear of the Trojans. Both were thus saved. Johnson is like Aeneas. The great names of the critics are like Neptune and Juno.

63. the judgment of Shakespeare—he was more interested in representing nature or life, not in following the rules.

64. Every man's......—Johnson is here talking about the historical method of approach to a literary work. Earlier Dryden spoke about it and used it in his *Preface to the Fables*.

a silent reference—one may not know much about an author and his age. But there is a general curiosity to know, and this must be satisfied. We desire to relate the work of the author and to the development of his art.

extend his designs—may enlarge the range to his art.

rate his native powers—value the genius.

instruments—materials that were available to him.

65. **barbarity**—state of ignorance.

Philology—study of literature.

learned language—Greek and Latin.

Lily—William Lily (1468-1522) travelled widely, became the first headmaster of St. Paul's, and taught Greek.

Linacre—Thomas Linacre (1460-1524) was one of the early champions of the New Learning.

More—Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) was a leading humanist of the Renaissance.

Pole—Cardinal Reginald Pole (1506-1558) became Archbishop and was partly responsible for the spreading of the new learning.

Cheke—Sir John Cheke (1514-57) was a zealous Greek scholar who became the first Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge.

Gardiner—Bishop Gardiner (1483-1555) was secretary to Wolsey and became Chancellor.

Smith—John Smith (1616-92) was a Cambridge Platonist, and author of *Select Discourses.*

Clerk—John Clerk was the Bishop of Bath till he died in 1541.

Haddon—He championed the cause of the Reformation.

Ascham—Roger Ascham (1515-1560) was a Greek scholar who wrote a book on archery called *Toxophilus.* His best work was the *Schoolmaster.*

elegance—refinement.

gross and dark—ignorant and unrefined.

66. **to literary curiosity**—to discover the beauties of literature.

Unacquainted......things—not having critical judgment.

vulgar—the ignorant people.

plebeian learning—the learning of the common person.

The Death of Arthur : Malory's romance called *Morte D'Arthur*.

67. **taste......truth**—taste for the dullness of truth with which the common man is familiar.

Palmerin—a chivalric Spanish romance by Francisco de Moraes (1500-72).

Guy of Warwick : a verse romance of the early 14th century.

unskilful—uncontrolled by critical judgment.

68. **has they not held**—had they not already known.

69. **The fable**—the plot of *As You Like It* came from Chancer's tale of Gamelyn. This was found in some manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer may have thought of writing it as his *Yeoman's Tale*. Actually Johnson knew that Shakespeare's plot was borrowed from Lodge's *Rosalynde*.

Mr. Cibber—Colley Cibber (1671-1757) was an actor and dramatist. Pope made him the hero of his *Dunciad*.

tale of Hamlet—the reference may be to *The History of Hamblet* (1608) which was a translation of Belleforest's version in *Histoires Tragiques*.

Saxo Grammaticus—the story of Hamlet is found for the first time in his *Historia Danica*.

70. **Chronicles**—Holinshed's *Chronicles*.

ballads—*King Lear* was said to be based on the ballad of *King Leire and his Three Daughters*.

by versions—through translations.

North—Sir thomas North (1535-1601) translated Plutarch's *Lives*. Shakespeare follows North's lauguage too.

71. **a rude people**—The Elizabethan audience. They were "wanting in learning and refinement."

sentiment—beautiful images.

argumentation—sequential expression as the one in *Cato*.

the marvellous—Johnson speaks of the marvellous as a term to "express anything exceeding natural power, opposed to the probable."

anxious for the event—eager to see the anticipated or expected event.

72. **the same original**—the some source or cause.

had more skill—were better trained to appreciate.

discriminated—chosen for emphasis.

must be done......said—action should always accompany speech.

73. **Voltaire**—Voltaire admits that the cold regularity of Addison's *Cato* cannot equal the "gross but engaging irregularities" of Shakespeare.

We find in Cato......—Johnson states that we admire the author of *Cato*, not the character of Cato. There is little of the characteristic human nature in Cato.

Judgment—it is that "which selects from life or nature what the present purpose requires, and, by separating the essence of things from its concomitants, often makes th representation most powerful than the reality."

its hopes......heart—we are not moved by the language of *Cato*.

We pronounce—we only mention the word because it does not move us.

74. **precious rarities**—gems.

clouded by incrustations—their brilliance is rendered less by the crusts of earth.

75. **the common......education**—the help of learning is general to those writers.

76. **dead languages**—Greek and Latin.

Jonson—Ben Jonson in the poem prefixed to the first Folio and entitled "To The Memory of my beloved, the Author". Jonson used the words, "Small Latin, and less Greek".

Who—Ben Jonson.

of equal force—of the same authority as Ben Jonson's.

77. **in many ..... writers**—in many passages where earlier authors have been consciously imitated.

78. **important**—Johnson is using the word ironically.

Go ..... follow—from *Richard III*, 3. 1. 144. The reference is to Zacharay Grey's *Notes on Shakespeare.*

I .... sequar—the words are from Terence.

Caliban—The reference is to the *Tempest*, 3.2. 151—2, where Caliban actually says "I cried to dream again".

Anacreon—a Greek lyric poet (500—418 B.C) of Teos. He sang of love and of wine.

80. **Plautus**—Founder of the Latin comedy. The *Menaechmi* was translated into English and published in 1595, though it was privately circulated in 1594.

but that ... inaccessible—If it had not been for the fact that they were not accessible in translation.

81. **modern languages**—French, Italian and Spanish.

french scenes—in *Henry V.*

English translation—Authur Brooke's *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562) was a poem based on the French version of Bandello's Italian romance.

original—original Italian.

He was to copy—He would copy.

82. **Ground of determination**—There is very little basis in the plays to determine whether he knew these languages.

high esteem—Wyatt and Surrey introduced it. Sidney spoke highly of it. Petrarch wielded great infiuence on the sonneteers.

83. **by Pope**—in his Preface he says : "Nothing is more evident than that he had a taste for natural philosophy, mechanics, ancient and modern history, poetical learning, and mythology. We find him very knowing in the customs, rites, and manners of antiquity."

must not be .... closet—to understand Shakespeare one need not have a deep knowledge of books.

sports of the field—he alludes many times to hunting and falconry.

manufacturers of the shop—terms from trade and commerce.

84. **indigent of books**—barren.

85. **essays**—attempts.

delight—"the satisfaction which they give to the fastidious taste of the critic."

86. **gradations of improvement**—steps in the evolution of his genius and art.

Rowe—in his edition of Shakespeare (1709).

beginning—early efforts.

art—skill, quality of the mind.

as they... vigorous—the natural vigour of one's genius is best expressed in youth.

certain purpose—definite purpose.

diligence—patient and careful study and observation.

opportunity—like higher education.

87. **vigilence of observation**—careful and attentive observation of distinctions and minute details.

perspicacity—clearness.

body—essential character.

to provide—to supply from observation.

characters of Chaucer—Chaucer's characters in the *Canterbury Tales* are drawn from life. Each character retains its distinct features.

to whom......indebted—Pope stated that Shakespeare was "no less conversant with the ancients of his own country", and he observes that "he has made use of Chaucer in *Troilus and Cressida*, and in the *Two Noble Kinsmen*, if that play be his". Johnson is refuting this view.

in its native colours—in all its complexity and diversity.

88. **The contest**—the controversy whether man by nature is benevolent or malevolent.

speculation—philosophy.

seminal principles—basic or root principles.

from that time—from the time of Hobbes and Locke.

nice discernment—meticulous care and understanding.

in truth—in the gravity of truth.

gleaning his own remarks—forming his own impressions and views.

89. **Boyle**—Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, wrote heroic plays during the Restoration.

favoured his curiosity—he had the means to have his intellectual curiosity satisfied.

his access—his access to books.

so many—such works are plenty.

considers them—examines them.

conversation—acquaintance.

encumbrances .. fortune—the hindrances which his poor circumstances raised against his genius.

as dewdrops .....mane—a quotion from *Troilus and Cressida*, 3.3.222.

90. **many modes of life**—varied conditions of life. We have a studious scholar in Hamlet, an ambitious general in Macbeth, and a doting father in Lear. From the slums to the royal courts, all aspects are presented.

casts—moulds.

vary ....multiplicity—represent them in all their variety.

to mark—to distinguish.

proper combinations—with all their contradictions.

maxims .. ..knowledge—principles of philosophy.

rules .. ..prudence—principles of great practical value in life. The reference is to the advice given by Polonius to his son.

91. inanimate world—nature.

peculiarities—distinguishing features.

really exist—exist in actual life.

of wit—of men of learning.

sink into oblivion—they are forgotten after a time.

the first—The oldest poets of many nations.

from knowledge—from their own knowledge of things, from their personal observations.

resemblance—similarity between their work and nature.

to another—to another age.

any other mind—any other work of an earlier poet.

92. effused—spread widely.

Dennis—in his "Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare," a series of three letters. The quotation is from the first letter.

very original—originator.
tragical harmony—verse of tragedy.

dissyllable ..... terminations—weak endings which are frequent in the later tragedies.

diversity—variety of these terminations.

93. appropriates—attributes.

Gorboduct—an early tragedy in blank verse, after the fashion of Seneca.

Hieronyms—Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, written between 1585-87.

would not ..... esteemed—The popularity of a work is a criterion of its greatness or merit.

94. Spenser—Edmund Spenser, author of the *Shepherd's Calender* and *Faerie Queene*.

Rowe—There is a womanly grace in the verse of Rowe, and very little energy in his diction or movement. His tragedies are *The Fair Penitent* and *Jane Shore*.

95. he owes ..to us—he owes our blind praise and veneration of him.

modern critic—John Upton. His *Critical Observations on Shakespeare* (1746) is referred to.

anomalies—passages of contradictory nature.

96. standard—level, requirements.

to credit their encomiasts—to believe in the praises given by their admirers.

to spare the labour—to escape those troubles.

contending with themselves—attempting to create something new.

97. levied......times—forced the homage of the future to himself.

solicited no .... reader—he did not much care for the honour that would befall him from the praises of a reader. Hence he did not care to get his plays published.

therefore made .. ..dialogues—Because he was not interested in publication, he did not mind repeating the same jokes in the dialogues of different plays.

knot of perplexity—Shakespeare's favourite device in resolving his plots is to dress up his women characters as boys.

98. retired to ease and plenty—After his famous plays, Shakespeare was a wealthy man who bought an estate and retired to his native place.

declined ...years—from *Othello*, 3.3.267. He retired even when he had the vigour of manhood.

those that had .... published—the Quarto editions.

depravations .....them—the pirated editions.

the rest—unpublished ones.

99. late editions—recent editions.

till about .....death—Shakespeare died in 1616 and the First Folio came in 1623.

thrust into .. ..knowledge—the later editions published in Quarto form were only reprints, and therefore they have all the defects of the earlier editions.

100. clandestine or professed—pirated or genuine. There were good Quartos published during Shakespeare's day, and these were from the genuine manuscripts.

late revisers—recent editors.

brought others—brought other passages.

unskilfulness and affectation—employment of conceits, puns, solecisms and the like.

temerity—boldness.

101. The faults are .. ..causes—Many factors have combined to give rise to an extremely faulty text of the plays.

Copyers—Those who provide the actors with copies of their parts.

102. Warburton—William Warburton made this remark in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare in 1747. Warburton said : "For, what between too great attention to his profit as a player, and too little to his reputation as a poet, his works, left to the care of door-keepers and prompters, hardly escaped the common fate of those writings, how good soever, which are abandoned to their own fortune, and unprotected by party or cabal." Warburton held that the works were neglects. But Johnson believed that they were not properly edited.

Rowe—Nicholas Rowe edited the plays in six volumes in 1709. It had an "Account of the Life of Shakespeare". He the was first editor, and the fight to give an authoritative account of his life.

not because .....by a poet—Warburton wrote, "His growing eminence, however required that he should be used with ceremony ; and he soon had his appointment of an editor in form. But the bookseller, whose dealings was with wits, having learnt of them, I know not what silly maxim, that *none but a poet should presume to meddle with a poet*, engaged the ingenious Mr. Rowe to undertake this employment."

if they had produced them—if they had found them for themselves, they would have rectified them only after long explanations, proving themselves on their skill and intelligence. The later editors reproduced Rowe's text without knowing what emendations he made in the original.

103. the author's life—Rowe's biography of Shakespeare was the standard one during the century. Rowe preserved a good many traditional incidents.

104. Mr. Pope—Pope's edition was published in six Quartos. The first was dated 1725 and the others 1723. Pope discusses in the Preface the merits and demerits of the several Quartos and Folios and declares them to be untrustworthy. He stated : "I have discharged the dull duty of an editor to my best judgment, with more labour than I expect thanks, with a religious abhorrence of all innovation, and without any indulgence to my private sense or conjecture...... The various readings are fairly put in the margin, so that every one may compare 'em ; and those I have preferred into the text are constantly *ex fide codicum*, upon authority. The alterations or additions which *Shakespear* himself made, are taken notice of as they occur. Some suspected passages which are excessively bad (and which seem In erpolations by being so inserted that one can entirely omit them without any harm or deficience in the context) are degraded to the bottom of the page ; with an Asterisk referring to the places of their insertion. The scenes are mark'd so distinctly that every removal of place is specify'd ; which is more necessary in this Author than any other, since he shifts them more frequently : and sometimes, without attending to this particular, the reader would have met with obscurities. The more obsolete or unusual words are explained. Some of the most shining passages are distinguish'd by Comma's in the margin ; and where the beauty lay not in particulars but in the whole, a star is prefixe'd to the scene. This seems to me a shorter and less ostentatious method of performing the better half of criticism (namely the pointing out an Author's excellencies) than to fill a whole paper with citations of fine passages, with *general Applauses*, or *empty Exclamations* at the tail of them. There is also subjoin'd a Catalogue of those first Editions by which the greater part of the various readings and of the corrected passages are authorised (most of which are such as carry their own evidence along with them)".

collated old copies—compared the text of the several editions.

integrity—genuine and true state.

more of amputation—omitting lines completely instead of mending them.

105. **by Warburton**—In his preface Warburton said that 'he separated the genuine from the spurious plays." The refercnce is to the play. *Pericles, Locrine, Sir John Oldcastle, Yorkshire Tragedy, Lord Cromwell, The Puritan*, and *London Prodigal.*

were given—in the first Folio.

Heminge and Condell—friends and first editors of Shakespeare.

licentiousness......times—in those times the copyright law was not strict or helpful to the author. The unscrupulous publishers can bring out the plays and foist them on a known author.

the edition of 1664—the third Folio.

106. **understood......undertaking**—He took up the duty of editing the works of Shakespeare. But the duty of an editor is two-fold. First he must collate different copies, then he has to choose the proper reading. Pope understood the first duty only.

best suits......opinions—The choice must be first determined by general acceptability.

author's .. ..thought—The second consideration is that the reading preferred must agree generally with the author's style.

107. **confidence..... success**—If you succeed in one endeavour, it increases the confidence in one's own abilities. Pope's poems and translations were successful and he was praised. So he took to editing Shakespeare and hoped that his edition would be final and authoritative.

Universal—could be exercised on any and every subject.

So much offended........—There was the controversy between Pope and Theobald. Pope edition came in 1725. In the next year Theobald published his *Shakespeare Restored : or, a Specimen of the many errors, as well Committed, as unamended, by Mr. Pope in his late edition of this poet. Designed not only to correct the said edition, but to restore the true reading of Shakespeare in all the editions ever yet published.* He continued his criticism of Pope's edition in *Mist's Journal* and in the *Daily Journal*.

108. exact—accurate.

109. narrow comprehension—limited understanding.

little .... learning—learning did not bring him a refined or broad vision.

collated the ancient copies—Theobald collected all the 41 quartos of which 28 are earlier than the first Folio.

110. reiteration of editions—reprints from the same edition.

111. exuberant excrescene—when he hits upon the right meaning or reading he praised his own genius and skill.

lopped—omitted.

the inflated emptiness .....rest—a few examples of Theobald's verbose flourishes are included to show the reader why the others were omitted.

112. faithless—because he did not acknowledge his great indebtedness to Warburton.

So willingly ....—But Nichol Smith observes on Theobald's edition : Like all the others, Theobald based his text on that of the last edition. He based it on Pope's even when he was the hero of *The Dunciad*. Consequently there is much of Pope in his text, much more than he can have suspected, and then a careful collator could have allowed. He preserved many needless emendations, even whole passages where Pope had taken great liberties ....In his Table of the editions which he had collated, Pope is placed under the heading 'Editions of No Authority.' It was Theobald's authority far too much. He may speak of his 'diligent and laborious collation' of all the old copies, but no one who has tested his work minutely can deny that his collation was haphazard. Another blemish is that he wrote bad notes, long, flabby and dealing in wearisome reiteration with the short-comings of Pope. They alone would explain Johnson's estimate. We tire of the recurrent panegyric of his critical acumen, as he, too, had tired of it when he came to prepare his second edition."

113. Hanmer—Sir Thomas Hanmer's edition of Shakespeare in six quarto volumes came in 1743-44. It was published anonymously and known as the "Oxford Edition". He "relied

on Pope's judgment as to the authenticity of passages and on Theobald's accuracy in collation". In 1745 Johnson in his *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* censured Hanmer. He observed that the pomp of Hanmer's edition "recommends it more than its accuracy. There is no distinction made between the ancient reading, and the inovations of the editor ; there is no reason given for any of the alterations which are made ; the emendations of forever eritics are adopted without any acknowledgement and few of the difficulties are removed which have hitherto embarassed the readers of Shakespeare". But here Johnson is highly enthusiastic of Hanmer and appreciates his labours.

without shew—without being pedantic.

passes—passes by.

114. **found the measures**—Hanmer noticed the earlier attempt to regularise Shakespeare's metre. Those attempts were approved, and so he completed the work.

without reprehension—without being censured.

often just—this is Johnson's reply to Warburton's objections to Hanmer's regularising efforts.

115. **without any .....copies**—without noting the different readings of other texts.

made .. ..authority—because he added very little of his own.

to suspect... ..fallibility—to suspect that a critic is liable to err.

116. **diligent consideration**—careful enquiry.

117. **the last editor**—William Warburton. His edition came in 1747 in eight volumes. He speaks of blunders of the first editors and of the interpolations of the two last editors. Though the edition gave the names of Pope and Warburton, the work was entirely Warburton's. Johnson has great regard for his learning, not for his edition.

high place—Warburton was a Bishop.

tenderness......reputation—anxiety that the reputation of a living editor should not be damaged or mitigated.

to example—an example.

since the ardour ...remitted since he retired from the writer's profession.

118. acquiescence .....thoughts—agreement with the first impressions.

119. specious—ingenious.

wantonness of insult–the desire to be rude and offensive.

120. confutation—repudiating the statements of the previous editors.

revolutions of learning—changes in the literary history.

comments an author—commen.s on an author.

as truth—these opinions have the value of absolute truths in a particular period.

in motion without progress—we appear to move only in a circle.

contrarieties of error—mistakes which are opposed to one another.

leaves another—leaves another generation.

121. contradictions—praised at one time and censured at another.

but as—at best as.

How canst thou beg for life—The reference is to the *Iliad.* Lykaon, The Trojan, pleads with Achilles for his life. This is the reply of Achilles. The Shakespearean critics is like Lykaon. Achilles stands for the original writers.

122. Canons of criticism—the title of a pamphlet by Thomas Edwards (1699-1757). The pamphlet came in 1748 as "A Supplement to Warburton's Edition". Warburton stated in his preface : "I have religiously observed the severe canons of literary criticism". This was a severe and damaging attack on Warburton's edition.

Review... text—Benjamin Heath (1704-66) gave in 1765 a pamphlet entitled *The Revisal of Shakespeare's Text.*

airy petulance—peevishness which is wide of the mark.

think on one—that is, of Edwards.

danger of Coriolanus—See *Coriolanus*, 4-4.5 : "lest that thy wives with spits, and boys with stones, in fury battle slay me". Warburton is Coriolanus, and critics like Edwards are the "girls with spits".

the other—Heath.

prodigy in Macbeth-*Macbeth*, 2. 4. 12, refers to the phenomena portending the murder of Duncan. Warburton is the falcon, and Heath is the "mousing owl."

123 **the little .....others**—finding that they cannot get at the proper emendation themselves, they should be charitable to others' efforts.

124. **licentious ....editors**—the wildest conjectures of the editors.

Every cold empiric......—a disinterested philosopher has a fancy and it is approved. Then he indulges in more fancies without caring for the test of practical life. Similarly a collator strike upon a happy emendation. When it is approved, he indulges in the wildest of conjectures. This happened to Upton.

125. **Dr. Grey**—Dr. Zachary Grey published his *Notes* in 17?4. In 1755 he retaliated on Warburton.

rather his memory—he called up parallel passages from older English writers.

126 **to refer...author**—to acknowledge the source.

in some—in some emendations.

to encroach upon—to have taken up even unconsciously.

the second—The unconscious borrower.

127. **acrimony**—bitter hatred.

questions...wit—they can only rouse the intellect, not the emotions.

small things ..proud—In *II-Henry VI*, 4. 1-106, we read, "small things make base men proud".

Contrariety—difference.

Controvertist—controversialist.

128. **vehemence of the agency**—when the subject of controversy is trifling, commentators grow violent.

agency—editor, commentator.

indifferent...name—a word or a phrase is insignificant till the name of its author is associated with it. Then great controversies arise around it.

turbulence...dignity—when there is no argument, there is violence of temper.

129. **depravations**—corruptions in the text.

130. **subjoin**—add.

131. **to obstruct**—to be difficult to.

facilitate their passages—render easy the passage of the difficult parts through the mind of the reader.

censures merely relative—Such a criticism must be accepted patiently because it comes from a relative standard of judgment. The ignorant may say that the notes are not sufficient. The learned may say that they are elaborate.

scrupulously reserved—scanty because of too much attention. He is over-zealous and does not want many passages to be explained.

132. **not systematic and consequential**—his writings betray no system and no logical arrangement.

desultory and vagrant—rambling.

casual allusions—allusions to the incidents of the day.

light hints—allusions to trifles.

too minute .....law—they have not been listed because they are peculiar to persons and they may change from day to day.

fugitive—slip away from the attention of the later generations.

illustration—explanation of the text.

133. **marginal directions**—notes placed in the margin.

134. **very diligent to obscure**—scrupulously attentive to note down always.

I gave this...caprice—A few plays have found more judicial comments than others. But this does not mean that I consider them to be more important. In other words, I have not observed in this matter any definite plan or system.

what we find or make—what we are able to discover or construct for ourselves.

what we receive—what we get from the judgment of the critics.

as the memory—even as the memory.

tablebook—memorandum.

initiation—introduction into the secrets of the art of judging.

precept—rule or example.

habit—experience.

135. strictures—critical pronouncements.

affectation of singularity—showing off a point of view which is different from the commonly accepted one.

136. ostentation—showiness of Theobald.

acrimony—bitter quarrel between Pope and Theobald.

conspiracy—Johnson's edition provoked Kenrisk to publish "A Review of Dr. Johnson's new edition of Shakespeare, in which the ignorance or inattention of that editor is exposed, and the poet defended from the persecution of his commentators" (1765). Trywhitt attacked Johnson in his "Observations and Conjectures upon some passages of Shakespeare" (1766). The *Monthly Review* for October and November 1765 had two more unsympathetic essays.

137. in one copy—the first Folio.

peril—danger of conjecture.

138. emulation—the emendations of successive editors show that each was emulating the practice of other.

advanced into—adopted in.

have left in the notes—indicated the alternate readings in the notes.

specious—plausible.

animadversion—criticism.

139. **collectors .....communicative**—this was taken to be a reference to himself by Garrick and Garrick felt offended.

140. **many .. ..unauthorised**—these passages could not be found in any edition of Shakespeare. .

to him—to Rowe.

smoothed in cadence—this was done by Hanmer.

141. **without notice**—without any comment.

142. **disturbed .. sense**—this was the purpose of Rowe, Pope and Hanmer.

the first publishers—Heminge and Condell.

the copy—the original text of Shakespeare.

143. **any interstice......way**—any loophole that can allow light to come in ; any clue which can make the passage intelligible without changes.

Huetius—Pierre Daniel Huet (1630-1721) was a French scholar who published the classics for the use of the Dauphin. He was the author of *Traite de l'origine de romans*, and *De Interpretatione libri duo.*

trouble of research—trouble of collating old copies.

rescued—restored from the first Folio.

Roman sentiment—The acceptance of the reading of the Folio or of the Quarto. The enemy is the suggested emendation of the later editors.

144. **authority**—authority of Shakespeare.

later editions—those of Rowe, Pope and others.

preceding copies—Quartos.

settled mode—accepted fashion.

imitative action—drama.

this method—the method of dividing the play into scenes and acts.

145. the punctuation .. power—the original editors did not worry about punctuation. But as simpson has argued effectively, this view is wrong. The basis of Elizabethan punctuation was in rhetoric, not in grammar.

adjusting points—putting the punctuation marks.

evanescent atoms—punctuation marks.

evanescent truth—punctuation marks.

146. particles—words like *as* and *or*.

147. passing trifles—ignoring trifles.

cannot much reproach them—these objections do no deserve any notice.

148. encreases—increases.

149. confined ... margin—all the emendations based on conjecture are placed only in the margin.

reprehensible—fit to be censured.

in its own dominion—in the margin.

150. importunately obtruded—thrust upon the reader's attention with great persistence.

spacious—specious, plausible.

151. suspected .....right—If a reading demands on elaborate note, it must be false. If the elaborate note is required to prove it false, it must be right. In both the cases the length of the notes makes the reading suspicious.

quot ... feceris—do not do what you are doubtful about."

152. shore—the shore of editorial work where many a reputation was wrecked.

miscarriage—failure.

to censure those—censure Pope and Warburton.

dispossessing—rejecting their emendations as useless.

critics, I saw—the passage is from Pope's *Temple of Fame* 37-40.

153. no system .. ..positions—no basis principles on which such a criticism is based.

attempt—attempt at conjecture.

parts connected—connected by syntax or grammar.

154. allurements—attractions.

155. revival of learning—Renaissance.

Bishop of Aleria—Giovanni Antoni's Andrea (1417-1480) was the editor of Herodotus, Livy, Lucan, Ouid, Quintilian and others.

Bentley—Richard Bentley (1663-1742) wasa great classical scholar who sought to prove that the letters of Phalaris were spurious.

regimen—syntactical relation between two words.

invariable quantities—definite metrical values.

conspire—agree.

Scaliger—The French scholar of the Renaissance.

salmasius—a younger contemporary of Scaliger who entered into a controversy with Milton over the execution of Charles I.

Lipsius—a Belgian scholar of the 16th century.

Illudunt .....incidimus—"our conjectures, of which we re ashamed, laugh at us after we have fallen up on better nanuscripts".

Ult .....laboratur—"earlier they were suffering from efects, and now they suffer from their own remedies".

56. the expectation of.....tyrannical—the ignorant ope that we will do much. But they do not know what they xpect of their authors. The learned expect a good deal, and ey know what they want.

by design—intentionally.

57. When his fancy... ..wing—when he is carried away n the wings of fancy.

attempt exactness—try to go into details.

158. the general......weakened—if we begin reading the play with the help of the notes, we are unimpressed by it.

refrigerated—cooled by the interruption of the notes.

159. smaller niceties—beauties of the minute parts.

160. Dryden—the reference is to his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. Johnson speaks of this passage as a "perpetual model of encomiastic criticism."

the images .....still present—Nature supplied him with a permanent store of ideas and images.

Quantum .....cupressi-"as the cypresses raise themselves among the strubs". It is from Virgil's *Eclogues*, 1. 26.

161. types—printing.

162. candidates of inferior fame—the critics of Shakespeare. The critics who contend for the fame of restoring and explaining Shakespeare.

solicitude—anxiety.

sentence—judgment.

PROBLEMS FOR STUDY

1. Comment on the following statements :

   (a) "Shakespeare is above all writers the poet of nature"

   (b) Shakespeare's "persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated".

   (c) "In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual ; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species".

   (d) "The choice is right, when there is reason for choice".

   (e) "Shakespeare has no heroes"

   (f) Shakespeare's "drama is the mirror of life".

   (g) "There is always an appeal open from criticism to nature".

   (h) "All pleasure consists in variety"

   (i) "His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct".

   (j) "He that thinks reasonably must think morally.

   (k) "It is always a writer's duty to make the world better".

   (l) "A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it".

   (m) "Shakespeare is the poet of nature."

   (n) "The stage is only a stage, and the players are only players."

   (o) "A play read, affects the mind like a play acted".

   (p) "We pronounce the name of *Cato*, but we think on Addison."

(q) "I have adopted the Roman sentiment, that it is more honourable to save a citizen, than to kill an enemy."

2. Estimate Johnson as a neoclassical critic.
3. Consider Johnson as a critic of life.
4. What does Johnson mean by Nature ?
5. Explain the words *Reason, Nature, Life and Experience* in Johnson's criticism.
6. Consider Johnson as a Shakespearean critic.
7. Examine Johnson's defence of the mingling of the Comic and the Tragic.
8. Explain Johnson's attack on the unities.
9. Give an account of the work of the earlier editors of Shakespeare.
10. Estimate Johnson's method of editing and explaining Shakespeare.
11. Examine Johnson's ideas regarding Shakespeare's learning.
12. Evaluate the *Preface to Shakespeare.*
13. Show Johnson's independence of judgment.
14. What elements of the new approach to Shakespeare do you find in Johnson ?

Kitab Mahal Series on English Literature

Title Printed at : **Masood Printers**, *88-McLeod Road, Lahore.*